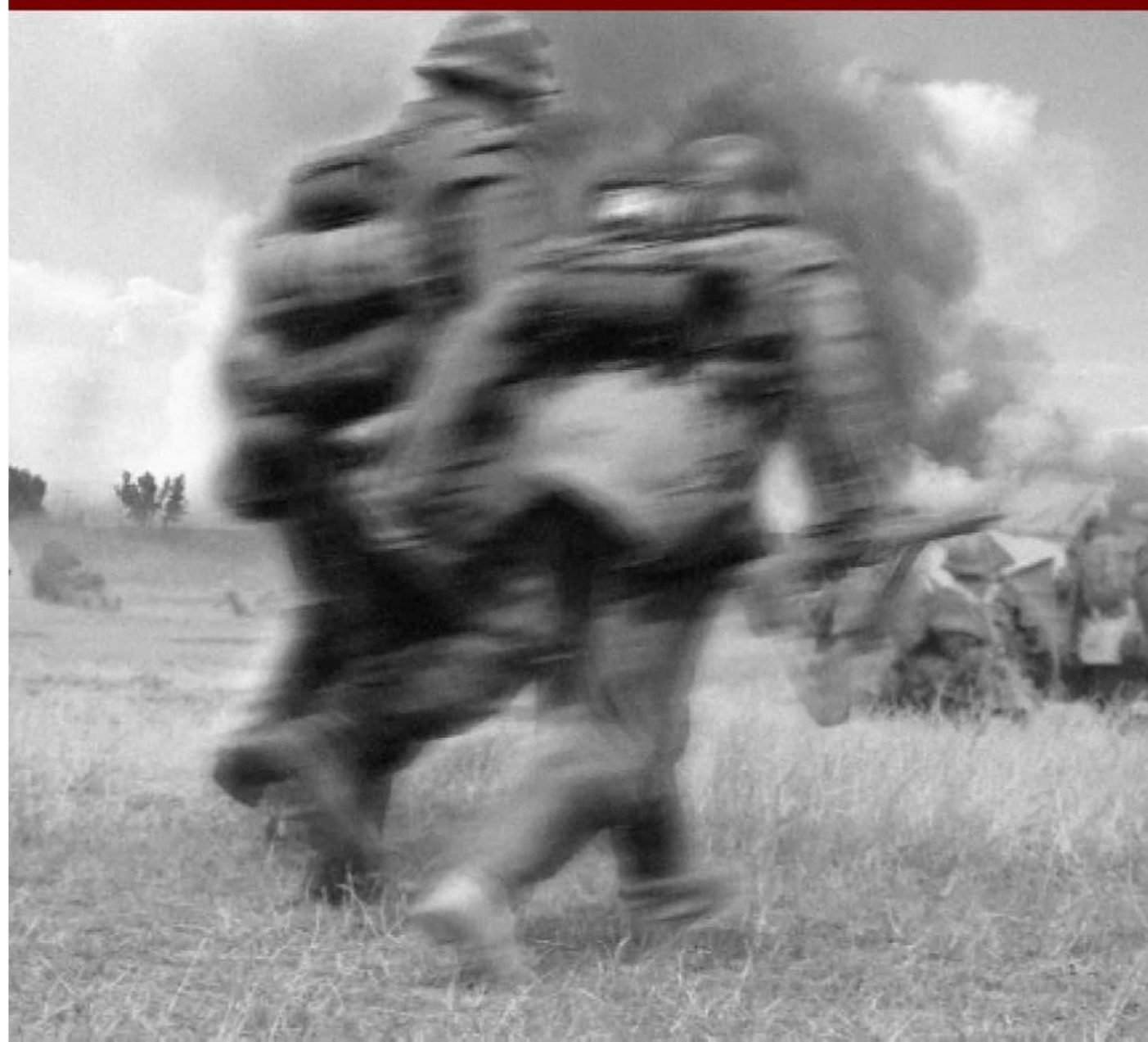


1939 - THE WAR THAT HAD MANY FATHERS

THE LONG RUN-UP TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by Gerd Schultze-Rhonhof



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FOREWORD

To begin, I would like to mention five things: the idea, the sources, the ambition and structure of the book, and the contextualization of its content within current events.

First, the book idea. A few years ago, I was preoccupied with the question of what possessed my fathers' generation to prepare for and start a new war after the catastrophe of the First World War. Initially, I only thought of the German fathers. The results of the Nuremberg Trials initially suggested as much. However, in my search for answers, I came across much that was previously unknown to me. This was primarily the context of world events at the time. Standard German historiography, from the usual school history textbook to the standard works of the Military History Research Office, almost completely ignores this context – for whatever reason. History is viewed there with tunnel vision. It was only during my research that I first read in foreign literature about the environment in which the Second World War erupted. The prehistory of this war resembles a detective novel; to my surprise, one with an entire group of perpetrators. This is how my book idea shifted. Instead of being on the trail of one perpetrator, I ended up following many leads and more perpetrators than I initially thought.

My second preliminary remark concerns the available literature and sources. In this book, I have used almost nothing that hasn't already been described somewhere. All sources are accessible to everyone in public libraries and archives or via the internet, and yet much remains unknown. Depending on the selection of literature and sources, however, quite different pictures of history emerge. The most prevalent historiography in Germany focuses on the German past and selects its sources accordingly. But this concentration narrows the view to the aforementioned tunnel vision, and it risks obscuring the international customs and trends of the periods described. It obscures the context in which the German past unfolded. This is particularly true for the lead-up to the Second World War. You simply can't write a report about a car race by only describing the Ferraris. It only becomes a race with all the cars on the track.

Foreign literature is nevertheless not a source of absolute truth. The English, French, Americans, and Soviets, like other nations, tend toward self-promotion and justifying their own actions. Despite this, they provided me with valuable clues in my work. The problem I encountered when

The challenge in the search for clues was that most sources conveyed an intention. There are the eyewitnesses whose accounts from before 1939 differ from their memoirs after 1945. Then there are the official volumes of documents that suppress sensitive information, such as the "Documents on German Foreign Policy" (ADAP), which I initially considered authentic because they were published in the 1950s as the official documentation of the Foreign Office in Bonn. Only later did I realize that this postwar edition of the German Foreign Office files was edited by American, British, and French academics and archivists. It should come as no surprise that the files were selected and even "washed" to favor the victors. For example, this reprint omits the first official threat of war over Danzig. It was issued by the **Polish** ambassador in Berlin in March 1939, even before Hitler ordered the Wehrmacht leadership to prepare for war against Poland. However, there is a publication of the same documents from 1939 (AA 1939) which still contains this threat.¹

But even this collection of pre-war documents is not without its flaws. Like the "British War Blue Book" and comparable documentation from other nations, it omits many letters and protocols that incriminate the respective governments. Thus, I found omissions, revisions, falsifications, and self-serving interpretations in the memoirs and documents.

What I found confusing about German literature was that the first post-war historiography was produced under legal restrictions that imposed limits on research. Article 7 (1) of the 1954 Transition Agreement stipulated that "German courts and authorities ... must treat all judgments and decisions" from the Nuremberg Trials "in every respect as legally valid and effective." The court's decisions included the "findings" regarding the course of events that led to the war. These are contained in the written judgments. According to the court's discretion, judgments could be reached even without the taking of evidence or against the arguments of the defense.² This opened the floodgates to the subjective perspective of the victorious powers, and the defeated Germans were legally obligated to adopt this perspective. Among the authorities that must treat these "findings" as legally binding in every respect are the state ministries of education, which oversee the content of history textbooks in schools. The investigating officials are bound by oath of office to this Article 7 of the Germany Treaty and thus to a reading of "history" that was definitively established in Nuremberg.

¹ In AA 1939, No. 2, document 208 **with** Polish threat of war and in ADAP, Series D, Volume VI document 101 (from 1956) **without** this threat.

² Articles 19 and 20 of the Statutes of the Nuremberg Military Tribunal. See ITM, Volume I, pages 7-9.

One might argue that the Transition Agreement and the year 1954 itself are already history. However, in 1990, the binding force of the judgments of the Nuremberg Trials was extended once again by treaty. In 1990, the Transition Agreement was superseded by the Two Plus Four Agreement, and the victorious powers insisted that the aforementioned Article 7(1) of the 1954 treaty remain in force. This was reaffirmed in writing by the German side in the "Agreement of September 27, 1990, on the Germany Treaty and the Transition Agreement," which accompanied the Two Plus Four Agreement.³ Thus, as a reader today, one is left wondering where historians and authors from the early Federal Republic, in compliance with the law, committed the victors' interpretation of history to paper and bequeathed it to subsequent historians and authors as a misleading legacy.

Given such a diverse range of literature and sources, it should not surprise the reader of this book that the picture of the period between the two great wars that has emerged for me differs in part from what is otherwise common knowledge in Germany.

Now to the third preliminary remark. I do not claim to have read and analyzed the thousands of books already written on the subject of my book, nor to be familiar with the latest scholarly publications on the topic. My aim is to place the history leading up to the Second World War in a comprehensible context and to tell it in an accessible way. I hope that this will be particularly helpful to younger readers in their search for their own understanding of history.

As a fourth preliminary remark, I would like to say something about the structure of the book. In my attempt to show connections, I have presented many things not according to their chronological sequence but according to their cross-references, e.g., the Poles' interactions with the Russians, the British, the Germans, etc., one after the other. Since many of the various cross-references and connections occurred during the same time periods and touch upon the same historical events, numerous repetitions in the text are unavoidable. This may bother some readers, while others might find it a welcome memory aid given the large number of events described.

The final preliminary remark concerns the placement of the topic within current events. Our German historical consciousness, insofar as it concerns the period of National Socialist rule, is shaped by the horrific aspects of that regime. We can hardly speak about this time without thinking of the collapse of the rule of law in the country and the cruel murder of Jews and other minorities. The memory of the crimes committed on behalf of the then-government casts a dark shadow over the...

³ Two-plus-Four Agreement, Prof. Stern, pages 227f and BM Justice dated 22.1.1997.

The era under consideration. National Socialism as the guiding principle of the regime at that time and the collapse of parliamentarism after 1933 certainly created conditions that made it easier for Hitler to launch a war against Poland in 1939. However, neither of these caused the Second World War. A similar point can be made about the crimes committed by the German Reich government against the Jews in Germany. While they strengthened America's commitment to Nazi Germany, they did not cause the Second World War. Thus, the unjust state and the murder of minorities were not the cause or pretext for the war. Therefore, they are not the subject of this book, nor its central theme. Rather, I intend to attempt to describe what led to the second conflict between nations within 25 years in 1939.

When dealing with warring parties, it's natural to consider them all together. Much in our German history between 1919 and 1939 cannot be understood without knowledge of concurrent events in other countries; their effects and interactions are often too closely intertwined. However, it wasn't only the concurrent history of our neighboring nations that influenced the outbreak of war; it was also—and this is not insignificant—the shared history of the warring parties. The Israeli ambassador to Bonn, Asher ben Nathan, once answered the question in an interview on the television program DIE WOCHE IN BONN about who started the Six-Day War in 1967 and fired the first shots: "That is completely irrelevant. What matters is what preceded the first shots." Thus, almost every story has its prehistory.

The outbreak of war in 1939 cannot be understood without considering the person of the dictator Hitler. Hitler and the willingness of the Germans to follow him into war are incomprehensible without the Treaty of Versailles. The general outrage of the German people over Versailles cannot be understood without the prehistory of the First World War. And this prehistory, too, can only be understood by understanding the competitive behavior of the major powers in 19th-century Europe. This book will therefore have to begin with a lengthy introduction.

PART 1

PREHISTORY

The backstory

Reasons for war in Europe

The British-German rivalry

England's treaty policy

The fleet arms race

England's alternative

England's enemy image

The Moroccan crises

The Baghdad Railway: The German view from England

Franco-German conflicts

Alsace-Lorraine: The Rivalry in the Colonies

Russia's relationship with Germany

Germany as an “enfant terrible”

The tangle of conflicting interests

The spark of Sarajevo

The chain reaction of July 1914

The War Guilt of 1914

World War I

The burden of propaganda

The Treaty of Versailles and the ostracism of Germany

The first episodes of Versailles

The subjective view of peoples

The smell of burning in Europe

PREHISTORY

World War II cannot be understood solely by its outcome, but only by its prehistory. This is generally traced back to the Treaties of Versailles, Saint-Germain, and Trianon. However, the fact that these treaties could have become the seeds of a second world war can only be understood by those who know their history. These three treaties, which followed World War I, were imposed on the defeated states, and they were unusually harsh. In the treaties, the victors assigned sole responsibility for World War I to the defeated Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians. This sole responsibility then served as the "legitimacy" with which the victorious powers, in 1919, seized parts of the territories, populations, and national assets of the defeated and imposed exorbitant reparations on them. The Federal Republic of Germany, for example, continued to pay the remaining portion of these reparations for World War I, as stipulated in the treaty, until 2010.

The accusation of sole guilt *in 1919* provoked outrage among the German and Austrian populations because people in both countries still vividly remembered the political events of the final years before the war and the role of the victorious powers shortly before the outbreak of war. This knowledge could not be erased by the forced signatures on the treaties.

Furthermore, a profound knowledge of history was commonplace among the educated middle class at that time, and the elites in Germany, Austria, and Hungary therefore viewed and evaluated the events of 1914 and the years prior within a broader historical context. Anyone wishing to understand the reactions to Versailles and Saint-Germain in Germany and Austria, and anyone attempting to grasp the history of the peoples of Europe before 1939, must recall the events and contexts from the period before 1914. The Germans' knowledge of 1939 is the key to understanding their motives in that year.

The path to reconciliation between the warring nations after the First World War was blocked by the victors' refusal to acknowledge their own complicity in the war. Thus, the three treaties cemented enmity in Europe rather than building bridges for the future. The victors of 1918 thereby provided Adolf Hitler with his first major, popular theme: "breaking the shackles of Versailles."

⁴ Federal Ministry of Finance, November 27, 1996

Reasons for war in Europe

The historical understanding of the generation affected in Austria and Germany reaches far back into the past. In their view, the First World War is not an isolated or exceptional case in history. Repeatedly throughout history, rising nations and states have earned and fought for their place alongside dominant nations and states by claiming and acquiring a share of the earth's natural resources, trade flows, and other sources of prosperity, and by daring to compete. For the generation of Europeans around 1900, the rise and fall of nations is part of world history and not a question of morality. Thus, the Germans of this time could see nothing wrong with the rise of their own country. The phenomenon of rise and fall in the modern era is, for them, something like a historical law of nature. Incidentally, the view in England is the same .

Portugal's global and colonial empire, for example, was united with Spain in personal union in 1580, which thus replaced Portugal as the leading power in Europe.

As early as 1577, England began attacking Spain's trade routes. In 1588, Spain lost its hard-won naval supremacy against England with the sinking of its fleet. England then rose to power and, as Great Britain, assumed global dominance for three and a half centuries. It was only seriously challenged once, by France under Emperor Napoleon. Great Britain consistently ensured that no power on the continent or in the vicinity of its own colonies grew so strong that it could become a rival. The means to this end was to always intervene in conflicts between third parties on the continent in favor of the weaker states and to wage war against the "rising power." This policy of the "balance of power" secured the existence of the British Empire until the beginning of the Second World War. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Great Britain also waged a number of other wars to seize colonies from other states, to protect its own colonies from the independence movements of their inhabitants, or to thwart the expansion of its rivals' power and territory.

With this perspective, the average German citizen before the First World War considered Great Britain's hegemony to be a reality of indefinite duration. However, he did not see this as giving the British the right to determine the course and fate of the other nations of Europe.

⁵ Messerschmidt, page 84

⁶ balance of power

The British-German rivalry

One of the causes for the outbreak of the two world wars of 1914 and 1939 lies in Germany's economic rise after 1871. However, this alone would not necessarily have led to the First World War, which in turn triggered the Second. Furthermore, German politicians made two fatal errors before 1914. They failed to extend the German-Russian Reinsurance Treaty, and they gave Germany's economic rise a maritime component. Both of these actions drew Great Britain into the fray.

With German unification in 1871, an economic area of considerable dynamism emerged. Benefiting from a well-developed education system and endowed with the most important natural resources of coal and iron ore within its own borders, Germany's productivity and foreign trade rose rapidly to an alarming degree for England. From 1880 to 1907, for example, Germany quadrupled its coal production, almost catching up with England. During the same period, German ironworks rose to first place in Europe in pig iron production. By 1907, Germany was already producing twice as much steel as England. Germany's foreign trade developed accordingly. Although London attempted to curb German exports in 1887 with the "Merchandise Marks Act," which required the consumer warning "Made in Germany," German foreign trade grew by 250 percent between 1887 and 1907, while English trade increased by only 80 percent over the same 20 years. France will also fall behind Germany economically during this period. This threatens England's balance of power on the continent.

This view is further compounded by the assumption that Germany is striving to dominate all of Europe. On January 1, 1907, Sir Eyre Crowe, an official in the British Foreign Office, wrote a memorandum in which he placed this economic rise of Germany in its historical context.

He writes that England had first put Spain, then the Netherlands, and finally France in their place. Now, at the beginning of the 20th century, these three powers were no longer serious rivals. Now and in the future, England's only potent adversary was Germany. The Germans were striving with consistency and energy for hegemony in Europe. All of Berlin's attempts at understanding, this memorandum concludes, were mere deceptions designed to distract England from the fact that

Germany wants to dominate the continent. Crowe comes across this view.

to influence and career. In 1920 he became Undersecretary of State in the Foreign Office.⁷

Germany's economic rise and its competition were clearly seen as a threat in England before the First World War. When then...

⁷ British Foreign Office

Even after Russia lost a war against Japan in East Asia in 1904, the last power that could pose a threat to Germany on the continent was weakened. In the eyes of the British, the balance of power in Europe had thus shifted in Germany's favor. Since 1904, British governments had been striving to isolate the German Empire in foreign policy. And German ineptitude provided ample opportunity for this.

England's treaty policy

England began to turn to France, its greatest rival in the colonies up to that point. The two countries concluded an "Entente Cordiale" in 1904.⁸ with which they initially only coordinated their colonial interests. In 1906, the war and foreign ministers of the two states agreed to army and navy meetings to coordinate military actions of both countries in the future. In 1911, things became more concrete. The British Chief of the General Staff traveled to Paris and pledged support to the French with six army divisions in the event of a war with Germany.

Thus, England committed itself to war against Germany, even though the latter had not issued the slightest threat of war. And from 1911 onward, France could count on England's support and, in the event of tension with Germany, gamble accordingly.

The first of the two fatal German errors mentioned above is the failure to secure treaties against Russia, as had been done previously. This allows England to supplement its Entente with France in western Germany with an alliance with Russia in eastern Germany, thus encircling the German Reich from two sides. The German-Russian agreements of 1873, 1884, and 1887 expired in 1890. Out of consideration for its ally Austria, the German Imperial government refrained from renewing the reinsurance treaties with Russia. In July 1905, Kaiser Wilhelm II and his Russian "cousin," Tsar Nicholas II, did conclude a Russo-German mutual assistance pact at a meeting on the coast of Finland, but the heads of government in Berlin and St. Petersburg refused to sign it.¹⁰ They feared that the new mutual assistance obligations could draw their countries into each other's wars. Thus, in 1905, Germany found itself without any protection against its large neighbor, Russia.

The British government seized this opportunity to forge closer ties with Russia itself, rather than with Germany. From 1906 onwards, negotiations took place in St. Petersburg regarding the colonial ambitions of both sides. In August 1907, the two states concluded the Anglo-Russian Treaty, in which they defined their spheres of influence in Afghanistan and Persia.

⁸ A cordial alliance

⁹ Grenfell, pages 12ff

¹⁰ Wilhelm II and the Tsar's wife are cousins.

Marking. But England was not content with political détente on colonial issues. As early as November 1907, General French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, traveled to Saint Petersburg to discuss far more than just Afghanistan and Persia with Russian generals and ministers. He suggested to the Russians that they reinforce their troops on the western border with Germany. Thus, Great Britain was also pulling the strings against Germany, which at that time had no other, especially no territorial, goals besides economic expansion.

The fleet arms race

The second fatal mistake Germany made in the face of England's claim to power was to combine its own economic growth with a maritime component, that is, to strengthen the German fleet. With increasing population and productivity, fishing and merchant shipping grew alongside foreign trade. From 1884 onward, the Reich also acquired its first colonies. Self-confidence grew in the economy, among the population, and in politics, and there was a belief in Germany that it could stand on equal footing with the established powers of France and England. The general enthusiasm for and belief in the meaning and benefits of global trade and world politics were as widespread in the German Reich at that time as the positive view of the globalization of politics and economics is today. The still young and, in this respect, imprudent Kaiser Wilhelm II, in particular, made Germany's equal standing in the world a central tenet of his political program. The Kaiser, son of an English princess and favorite grandson of Queen Victoria in London, was deeply impressed by everything he experienced as English culture and politics. His fascination with world trade, naval construction, and colonies stems from this inheritance.

From 1898 onwards, Kaiser Wilhelm II had a fleet built which, in addition to the coastal defense previously carried out, was intended to protect trade and overseas connections from interruptions in the event of international crises or in case of defense.

Germany was thus venturing into a field where other nations had long been established, so the expansion of its own navy was initially not unusual. In 1898, the German Reichstag passed its first naval construction law. England had already initiated new naval construction programs in 1889 and 1894, Russia in 1890 and 1895, Japan in 1896, and the USA in 1897.¹¹ Therefore, Kaiser Wilhelm II, the German Reichstag, and the naval command under Admiral von Tirpitz were by no means doing anything new, warmongering, or immoral with the expansion of the hitherto small German navy in 1898. After all, in 1898, the German fleet—as far as the major vessels were concerned—consisted of only nine battleships and first-class cruisers. The British fleet, by comparison, comprised 7,212.

¹¹ MGFA, Marine, page 222

¹² MGFA, Marine, page 181

In 1900, the German Reichstag passed its second naval construction law, which envisioned expanding the German navy to a strength of approximately two-thirds that of the British navy by 1920. This prompted Great Britain to take action. The German naval buildup from 1898 onward initially pursued the general goal of ensuring that Germany could keep pace with modern nations in the race for markets and influence in the world and not fall behind. More specifically, however, especially from 1900 onward, the Reich government, the Kaiser, and the naval command sought to establish a new position vis-à-vis England. Firstly, Germany aimed to protect its fishing fleet from the aggressive practices of English fishermen. Secondly, it wanted to free its imports and exports by sea, and thus a large part of its economic lifeline, from England's "grace." Thirdly, Germany sought to secure itself militarily against England's fleet, particularly against its naval blockade capabilities. Fourthly, German politicians hope to become an interesting alliance partner for Great Britain with an adequate fleet.

The first concern relates to the pirate methods with which England's fishermen frequently used at that time – even in German territorial waters – to harass German fishermen on the open sea and run through their nets.

The second objective is to leverage England's naval power, which it can use to tolerate, hinder, or prevent global trade. The third is a reaction to England's tradition of naval blockades, which in the past have cut off both enemy and neutral countries from their raw material and food imports during conflicts. The new German fleet is now intended to be so powerful that it will be able to break the so-called "close blockade" of German ports in the North Sea in the future. The fourth objective is of a strategic and political nature. The Imperial government, the Kaiser, and the naval command believe that

England believed that, in the event of a conflict with other naval powers, it might need Germany, with its respectable fleet, as an ally, and that this would allow it to establish a partnership with Great Britain on an equal footing. Furthermore, in the event of tensions between Great Britain and Germany, it was anticipated that England would prefer to maintain peace with a sufficiently strong German naval power and, if necessary, negotiate, rather than risk its own fleet in a naval war against Germany. The four motivations behind Germany's naval buildup before the First World War were therefore defensive. They aimed neither to initiate wars themselves nor to pursue colonial or other territorial gains. The world was, after all, already divided up.

However, the Kaiser, the Imperial government, and the naval command achieved the opposite of rapprochement with England, securing trade routes, and ensuring security for Germany through the fleet expansion. The thorn in England's side was rapid German economic growth and German trade competition on the continent and overseas. Neither of these could be combated with war without bearing the stigma of guilt for such an event.

to take over the war, unless one assigns the war guilt to Germany.

Thus, in English public opinion, German naval expansion was portrayed as a pretext for war, and Germany was accused of striving for world domination. In this context, it is interesting to compare the naval build-up in both countries, while also considering the navies of Russia and the USA.

The naval construction programs of Great Britain and the German Empire were based on different philosophies. Admiral von Tirpitz and the naval command developed the idea that a German navy approximately 60% the size of the British navy was the best way to achieve the four stated objectives: protecting North Sea fisheries, safeguarding domestic trade, preventing naval blockades, and maintaining alliances with England. According to Tirpitz, such a 60% fleet could not actually threaten England's security and naval supremacy. However, von Tirpitz believed it would allow Germany, if necessary, to break England's naval blockades and, in the event of war, attack and sink parts of the British fleet in the North Sea. Therefore, in such a case, Great Britain would be more inclined to seek an understanding with the German Empire than to wage war, rather than risk losing valuable ships.

The concept of risk gives the new Tirpitz fleet its name: "Risk Fleet".

Furthermore, Admiral von Tirpitz and the Kaiser calculated that Great Britain, in the event of a war with its two colonial rivals France and Russia, which maintained the next strongest navies after England, might have an interest in an alliance with navally powerful Germany. However, this calculation proved incorrect.

In England, there is a prevailing belief that the British navy must always surpass the combined size and strength of the next two largest fleets by approximately 10% to ensure victory, even alone, against two allied naval powers. This is the same line of thinking that led the Soviet Union, five decades later, to maintain excessively large land forces. In England, it is believed that this is the only way to secure British naval supremacy and the economic benefits derived from the colonies. Therefore, in 1899, the "Naval Defence Act" on the "two-power standard" was passed in London, enshrining the British fleet's superiority over the next two largest in naval power. In 1899, these were the French and Russian navies. However, from 1900 onward, the year of the second German naval construction law, two new competitors entered the market. From around 1903, it became apparent to the Admiralty in London that the previously second-rate fleets of the USA and Germany were becoming key factors in the two-power standard. In 1903, the German Navy overtook the French and Russian navies, thus securing second place after the already rising USA.

¹³ Two-power scale

Three in the world rankings. From now on, England must build a new ship of its own for every additional ship in North America **and** Germany. The number of large battleships in the USA and Germany grew almost constantly in equal numbers from 1901 until the beginning of the First World War, from 17 in each country to about 45.¹⁴ Great Britain accordingly increased its fleet from 43 in 1901 to 85 in 1914 in order to maintain the two-power standard. England attempted to escape the catch-up race of its competitors through a leap in quality, but this too proved unsuccessful.

From 1904 onwards, a new type of battleship, the so-called Dreadnought class, was laid down in English shipyards. It boasted higher speed, stronger armor, and more powerful onboard artillery than previous ships. However, the Royal Navy's "Dreadnought leap" did not bring the anticipated advantage. The USA followed suit later that same year; Germany, France, Japan, and Italy one to three years later.

This naval buildup is proving costly for Great Britain, and London must find a political solution. The search for a way forward involves many avenues. The first avenue England pursues leads directly to Germany. Between 1898 and 1901, the British government makes several attempts to dissuade Germany from warship construction through negotiation. Germany demands an Anglo-German alliance in return, which England is unwilling to enter into. This reinforces the German conviction that they need more ships to be considered viable and attractive for such an alliance. In 1907, at the Hague Disarmament Conference, the British make another unsuccessful attempt to contractually restrict German warship construction. In 1908 and 1912, King Edward VII of England and two cabinet members visit the German Emperor and the naval command to persuade them that battleship construction in Germany must be halted or at least significantly reduced.¹⁵ Since England was already contractually on the opposing side at that time and was also unwilling to conclude a German-English neutrality treaty at Germany's request, there was ostensibly no reason for the German Imperial government and the Kaiser to consider the 60% target.

to foresee the fleet's demise and halt shipbuilding.

The end of this first lead leads directly to the second. England seeks a balance of interests with the two existing naval powers, France and Russia. As already described, there is a reconciliation of colonial interests with both countries, resulting in the Entente with France in 1904 and the Anglo-Russian Treaty in 1907. Thus, from 1907 onward, Germany is part of a "Triple Entente" of France, Great Britain, and Russia.

¹⁴ MGFA, Marine, page 224

¹⁵ MGFA, Marine; pages 263 ff

The circle, which in 1914 after the assassination in Sarajevo skillfully passed the ball back and forth. Thus, the warning shot of Germany's naval policy backfired.

German historiography after the Second World War sees German naval armament as a major contributing factor to the Kaiser's and Admiral von Tirpitz's blame for the outbreak of the First World War. The argument goes that Germany, through its naval buildup, provoked Great Britain into this war. Here, German scholars follow the arguments of the victors of 1918. However, the real challenges of the pre-war years were German science and technology, economic growth, and competition in all markets. German naval construction, on the other hand, did not pose a serious threat to England, even if it did cause the British difficulties.

The construction of the Tirpitz fleet, with its four objectives—protecting German fisheries and trade, breaking blockades, and establishing alliances with Great Britain—was nevertheless legitimate, but unwise given the adversary, England. The naval construction in German shipyards held symbolic significance for the elites in Great Britain's economy, politics, and military. It unmistakably demonstrated what these elites had long since grasped: that Germany now demanded free competition and equal rights on the globe.

A true naval power requires not only a fleet but also strategic and geographical positions from which that fleet can operate. Great Britain possesses a stretch of Atlantic coastline and maintains naval bases worldwide, from Sydney to Gibraltar. From these bases, it can command and supply a navy. It can protect its merchant fleet and block other countries' trade routes. This second factor, which transforms a fleet into a naval power, is entirely absent in Germany. The German Reich is strategically trapped in the North Sea. Access to and from the German naval ports of Kiel and Wilhelmshaven can be cut off at any time by a narrow blockade in the North Sea, a wide blockade at the North Sea exits, or a strategic blockade in the Atlantic. If Germany had wanted to pose a threat to Great Britain at sea, it would have had to build an Atlantic fleet the size of the Royal Navy and have ports on the Atlantic coast. Neither Kaiser Wilhelm II, nor the Reich government, nor von Tirpitz ever aspired to this. The "risk fleet" was designed for the naval battles in the North Sea, not for a war over England's colonial empire. This was von Tirpitz's mistake, because his fleet could never truly harm Great Britain in the First World War. England's naval strategists knew all this, and yet, before the First World War, the British government and the king insisted that Germany posed a threat to Great Britain.

The threat theory has a second weakness, and this becomes apparent when considering all fleets together. Even before the start of the first German naval campaign...

With the advent of naval construction programs, England, Russia, France, Japan, and the USA began to modernize their fleets. Thus, Germany's naval expansion took place within the context of an international arms race. The increase in the number of German ships was therefore continually offset by the parallel development of the other navies. Germany's fleet had to be constantly considered in relation to the fleets of those states that had formed treaty alliances against the German Reich. In 1914, Germany's 45 battleships faced 150 ships in the fleets of Russia, England, and France. Since 1907, Russia had also been expanding its Baltic Fleet, tying down parts of the German Navy that were no longer available to counter England. And from 1912 onward, France assumed responsibility for securing the Mediterranean for England, thereby freeing up the British Mediterranean Fleet for deployment in the North Sea. For this reason as well, the Tirpitz Plan was a failure. At no point before the First World War did the German navy gain a strength that England should have seriously feared.

But from England's perspective, things look different.

Driven by a mixture of missionary zeal and business acumen, the elite and the people of England feel responsible for a global empire they acquired through arduous struggle and successfully maintained for over three centuries. The "right" to be number one, and to defend it if necessary, is for the British a natural right beyond question. Part of this fundamental understanding is the tolerance of no competition, neither on the seas nor on the continent of Europe. And competition can only be contained as long as it remains inferior. Over centuries, this has led to the development of the "balance of power" strategy. It ensures that no state in Europe can develop more power than the other power that keeps it in check. The German Empire violated this British "rule of the game" from 1902 onward, when the Kaiser's navy became larger than that of the Tsar of Russia. Furthermore, German naval expansion forced the British to come to terms with France and Russia, thereby relinquishing their freedom of action. He forces them to relinquish the protection of the sea and trade routes through the Mediterranean to France. And finally, the German Navy threatens England's North Sea coast. The fact that the Royal Navy does the same to the German North Sea coast is not morally justified.

The fact that the Tirpitz fleet prevented Germany in the First World War from doing what the Royal Navy planned, practiced, and investigated before and during the war—namely, landing troops on Germany's North Sea coast, blockading the North Sea, and penetrating the Baltic Sea in order to attack the German coast there together with Russia's Baltic Fleet—that the Tirpitz fleet prevented this, weighs little against the question of whether its construction partly caused the war. It is certain that naval construction in Germany influenced public opinion in England before the First World War.

¹⁶ British Fleet

World War II further fueled tensions. It is also certain that before the war, there was neither a plan nor an intention in Germany to start a war against Great Britain, regardless of the cause. And it is equally certain that between 1901 and 1912, the British government repeatedly refused to conclude a non-aggression or neutrality pact, or a friendship pact, with the German government. London insisted on its "right" to wage war against Germany. Tirpitz's and the Kaiser's hopes for greater security and improved alliance capabilities for the German Empire remained unfulfilled.

England's alternative

A comprehensive overview of navies before the First World War must also include a look at the US Navy. Germany and the USA had been building up their fleets at the same pace and in similar quantities since 1902. Thus, British fears of a threat could just as easily have been directed at the North American fleet. Furthermore, the USA was ahead of England in terms of industry and trade. And it had been acquiring colonies since 1898: Cuba, the Philippines, and Hawaii. Therefore, the three competitive factors that separated Great Britain from Germany applied equally to the USA: trade, colonies, and naval construction.

The fact that England and the USA nevertheless found common ground before the First World War, and not England and its neighbor Germany, must have its reasons.

London's "balance-of-power strategy" has been sufficiently explained. Another reason lies in America's evident shift towards England. Until the presidency of MacKinley, US relations with the German Empire were consistently friendly and balanced. Anglo-American relations, on the other hand, were still burdened by the legacy of Britain's former colonial rule and its colonial wars in America. This is evident, for example, in the US Navy's operational planning, which, under "Case Red," envisioned naval warfare against Great Britain.¹⁷ With MacKinley's assassination in 1901 and the transition to Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, a new way of thinking took hold in the US. Roosevelt and his successor, Wilson, were decidedly Anglophile. They sought a partnership with Great Britain. However, both believed that the time had come to replace England's hegemony with their own. Theodore Roosevelt initially seemed to be thinking only of the US achieving equality with England. Wilson, however, went further. In World War I under Wilson, the USA replaced England as the leading naval power, the dollar replaced the pound sterling as the dominant currency, and Wall Street superseded London as the financial center. This American triumph continued in World War II. In 1942, US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt forced the British to surrender the colonies as the price for his military aid.

¹⁷ Schwarz, page 39

to release. The USA is replacing the old British dominance in the international arena with a new order of supranational organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, and so on, which they initially dominate themselves.

Returning to Anglo-German relations from 1901 to 1914, England—although a global player—was strategically focused on Europe before the First World War. Concerns about the balance of power were directed solely toward the nearby German Reich. England could have been equally concerned and justified in its stance toward the United States and sought closer ties with Germany. There had been ample German requests for treaties between 1901 and 1912.

But the economic boom of its close rival had already inflamed public opinion in Great Britain. Feelings of competition, national pride, and a fixation on the balance-of-power concept on the European mainland prevented the English political elite from having any foresight. Before the First World War, England should have recognized that in the long run, only the USA, and not the German Empire, would surpass it. Only North America possessed the two indispensable prerequisites for naval power: a fleet and naval bases on the coasts of two oceans. Germany, on the other hand, possessed only a fleet. Without naval bases, it had no chance of prevailing against England on the high seas in the long term. Furthermore, the USA—as was already evident in 1901—had far greater growth potential than Germany, in terms of population, natural resources, and the dynamism of this giant nation's economy. Thus, before the First World War, England's political elite failed to recognize that it had to understand the balance of power on a global scale. She doesn't see that it will be the USA that will overshadow Great Britain within 40 years.

England's enemy image

The German-English estrangement is also evident in the changing image that historians in England paint of the history of their German neighbor. Before the turn of the 20th century, the shared ancestry of both peoples from the "free, brave, law-abiding, and democratic" Germanic tribes was still a positive, unifying element. Both Germans and Britons were frequently referred to as members of the Teutonic family of peoples. The simultaneous rejection of the Romance and French peoples reflects England's critical relationship with what was then the strongest continental power. From the turn of the century onward, Germany replaced France in the eyes of many Britons as the strongest military and economic power in continental Europe. Accordingly, England's Celtic heritage gradually gained historical prominence, while the shared Germanic heritage faded.

¹⁸ Messerschmidt, page 17

¹⁹ Messerschmidt, pages 27 and 39

The image of Prussia held by English historians was particularly influential politically. Until around 1910, the Prussian kings, considered very liberal, efficient, and respectful of their citizens' rights, along with the capable military and the patriotism of Stein and Hardenberg, dominated the political landscape. Afterwards, this previously positive image of Prussia transformed into that of a state characterized by unfreedom, subservience to authority, militarism, and violence.

This Prussia is often equated *pars pro toto* with all of Germany and, as such, represents in the eyes of many British historians the antithesis of the positively viewed liberal-parliamentary England. The "Teuton," decades earlier the ancestor of both the Germans and the British, even became a term of abuse for the Germans during the First World War, and Prussianism a "threat to civilization."²⁰

Not every English historian, however, views the new German Reich in such bleak terms. John Adam Cramb certainly admires the strength, the "heroism," and the discipline of the Germans. But what he writes in his 1914 work "Germany and England" sounds bleak in a different way.

*"The Germans are showing the impulse of an active, expansionist, world-empire-hungry people. ... Germany will encounter the English world empire like Alaric encountered Rome."*²¹ This is a portent.

The war significantly worsened Germany's image.

In writings between 1915 and 1918, the historian John Headlam-Morley "proves" based on history that

"The highly organized military state of Germany threatened Europe with totalitarian dictatorship, wanted to destroy the British Empire, and had long harbored a plan to achieve sole power before the war." Here, universities are clearly reenacting what has been circulating in the minds of England's²³

political elite for years. It is the seed for the later accusation of sole guilt at Versailles in 1919 and the accusation of world domination at Nuremberg in 1945.

In England, the prevailing image of Germany as an enemy has long since taken hold. Numerous surviving writings bear witness to this. For example, on June 11, 1904, the English ambassador, Sir Francis Bertie, wrote to a friend:

"Your letter of the 2nd reeks of distrust towards Germany, and you are right. Germany has never done anything but fleece us. It

²⁰ Messerschmidt, page

²¹ 60 The Visigoths under Alaric attack the Romans in northern Italy in 401 AD and are defeated.

²² Messerschmidt, page 84

²³ Messerschmidt, page 91

is wrong and greedy. Germany is in reality our economic and political enemy."

24

Sir Charles Hardinge, Under-Secretary of State at the London Foreign Office, writes in a memorandum dated October 30, 1906:

"It must be generally acknowledged that Germany, due to its ambitious plans for a world policy, maritime hegemony, and military dominance in Europe, is the only disruptive factor."

25

The growing hostility of the British towards their German cousins is also being noted abroad. The American Consul General in Munich, Gaffney, reflecting on his stays in Great Britain before the First World War, notes:

"During my annual visits, I was astonished and amused to observe the growing hostility towards Germany. My English friends did not hesitate to explain to me, with complete candor and the usual English arrogance, that it was necessary to destroy Germany or Great Britain would lose its economic supremacy on the world markets."

26

The biography of former US diplomat Henry White recounts a conversation between White and the leader of the British Conservative Party and former Prime Minister Lord Balfour, which they had in London in 1910. White, an American, evidently viewed Germany at that time as a rising power, much like the USA. His own country, America, was also expanding its naval base and trade.

Balfour: *"We are probably foolish not to find a reason to declare war on Germany before it builds too many ships and takes away our trade."*

White: *"In your private life you are a magnanimous man. How can you consider something as politically immoral as provoking a war against a harmless nation that has just as much right as you to maintain a fleet? If you want to compete with German trade, work harder."*

Balfour: *"That would mean lowering our standard of living." would have to. Perhaps a war would be easier for us."*

White: *"I am shocked that you express yourself in this way on fundamental issues." can."*

Balfour: *"Is this a question of right or wrong? Perhaps it is a question of maintaining our supremacy."*

27

²⁴ MGFA, Marine, page 267

²⁵ MGFA, Marine, page 268

²⁶ Gaffney, page 11

²⁷ Nevis, page 257

On April 19, 1911, Sir Arthur Nicolson, Deputy Secretary of State to Hardinge, warned his boss in a letter to turn away from Russia and towards Germany in foreign policy:

"It is impossible to convince the proponents of such a policy that Germany does not want to enter into a friendship on equal terms. We will find ourselves forced in the not-too-distant future to align ourselves with German wishes in every new matter." Measured against the goals of German foreign policy, this is paranoia. The goal of Berlin's foreign ²⁸

policy with London before the First World War was precisely that "friendship on equal terms." Otherwise, Berlin was attempting to break the ring of anti-German alliances that France, Russia, and Great Britain had formed between 1904 and 1907. In addition, the goals of German foreign policy included acquiring trade rights, mining and oil concessions, and colonies wherever this could be done without war.

This too puts a strained position between Great Britain and Germany.

The Moroccan crises

England's clear stance on France's side was evident in the so-called two Moroccan crises of 1904 and 1911. Both crises centered on Paris's attempt to extend its influence over Morocco, thereby violating an 1880 treaty that guaranteed the sovereign rights of the Sultan of Morocco and granted German trade concessions. The Second Moroccan Crisis of 1911—three years before the First World War—is infamous for the "Panther's Leap." This incident demonstrates Great Britain's readiness and willingness to enter a war with Germany, even over something as trivial as this. In 1911, Paris made its second attempt within just a few years to incorporate Morocco into its colonial empire. The Foreign Office in Berlin, fearing the loss of German trade and mining concessions in Morocco, ordered a German warship named Panther to put into the port of Agadir, outside the French occupation zone, and there "show the flag" to protect German interests. The Panther, a small multi-purpose vessel for river and coastal service in German colonies, was at that time due for an overhaul and was therefore on its way back from West Africa to the shipyard in Germany. It was bound for Casablanca to take on coal for the onward voyage, but was diverted beforehand. Thus, the Panther, almost without fuel and in need of repair, docked in Agadir on July 1, 1911. The British government immediately interpreted this as a violent demonstration of German power overseas and accused the German government of intending to establish a German naval base in Agadir. The British government demanded a statement from the German government, but before it could respond, it issued its own statement.

²⁸ MGFA, Marine, page 268

²⁹ Hildebrandt, pages 213 f

Part of the Royal Navy is mobilized, the coal supply for the naval ships is replenished, and Chancellor of the Exchequer Lloyd George declares on July 21, on behalf of the English government, "that his country will go to war on the side of France in the event of a German challenge."

France supplied the powder keg, England is waving the fuse, and Germany is left looking like the sinner.

The governments in London and Paris had apparently already agreed in 1904, without the knowledge of the government in Berlin, that Morocco was a French sphere of influence and that England would in return receive a free hand in Egypt and Sudan. German trade and mining rights in Morocco were seen as an obstacle. However, a dispute between the French and Germans over a few German rights in Morocco and the appearance of a small colonial service vessel were not, in themselves, grounds for threatening war. England's aim was once again to strengthen France as a counterweight to Germany, and it was a serious warning that any further activity by Germany would be met with war.

To the extent that Germany had desired further colonies before the First World War, this should not have been a cause for the subsequent Anglo-German disputes. After all, the German Colonial Ministry always tried to reach an agreement with the corresponding ministry in London regarding its wishes concerning Africa. For example, in July 1913, the two ministries in London and Berlin agreed on a draft treaty concerning the possible division of Portuguese colonies.³⁰

In Germany between 1914 and 1918, hardly anyone understood the rise of their own country in industry and trade as a reason for war.

Even crises like the two in Morocco, in which Germany merely tried to grab one last piece of the colonial pie, leave Germans with no sense of German guilt. At most, they fuel the fear of global isolation. After all, the German Reich—unlike the British Empire of the last 20 years—did not attack another white nation and seize its colonies.

The Baghdad Railway

Germany also emerged as a new competitor for England in the Middle East; initially in trade and, a few years before the outbreak of the First World War, also in oil production. From 1888 onwards, German industrialists and bankers endeavored to open up the Ottoman Empire as an economic sphere for Germany.

They are building a railway line from the Balkans to the city of Konya in southern Anatolia. Construction of the line, which runs through the oil-producing region, begins in 1903.

³⁰ Gebhardt, Volume 4/1, pages 29-32

The railway was intended to run from Mosul in present-day Iraq to Baghdad and later also to Kuwait. The German Emperor and the Deutsche Bank attempted to mobilize English capital for this purpose, which, after some effort, they partially succeeded in doing. In 1912, the Turkish government transferred to the Deutsche Bank the concessions for all oil and mineral deposits on both sides of the railway line as far as Mosul as compensation for its costs on the "Baghdad Railway."³¹ Thus, the German Reich became economically active in a region that Great Britain also wanted to develop.

At the same time, the naval power of Great Britain was striving to gain a foothold in what was then Ottoman Arabia and Persia and to secure the oil reserves discovered there. In 1899, the British concluded a treaty with the local sheikh in Kuwait, in which he promised that neither he nor his heirs would ever sign treaties concerning the establishment of third-party powers in Kuwait.³² In 1901 – around the time of the oil discovery – London sent warships to Kuwait and forced the Ottoman government to accept a British "protectorate" over the Sheikdom of Kuwait.³³ In 1913, Britain also had the oil production concessions there transferred to it by the Sheikh of Kuwait in exchange for monetary gifts.

Now, German oil activities, trade, and the German rail line into Iraq threaten to become serious competition for British penetration of Iraq from the south. The German railway to Kuwait would have, above all, devalued the British maritime transport monopoly there and given Germany its own access to the Persian Gulf.

The German view of England

In Germany before the First World War, the danger posed by England's claim to national security and supremacy on the five seas was largely underestimated. However, British global power politics and its ruthlessness were also acknowledged. The illegal conquest by which England, for example, annexed the Boer South African states of Orange and Transvaal in 1902, along with their gold deposits, left a strong impression on the Germans. Consequently, the British claim to naval power and their often ruthless foreign policy did not portray England as a guardian of democracy and human rights before the First and Second World Wars, and certainly not as a protector of attacked nations. This image of England only began to develop after 1945, when the events leading up to both wars faded from German memory. Before the two wars, Great Britain was primarily seen in Germany as a consistent advocate of its own interests.

³¹ Engdahl, page 46

³² Engdahl, page VII

³³ Engdahl, page 45

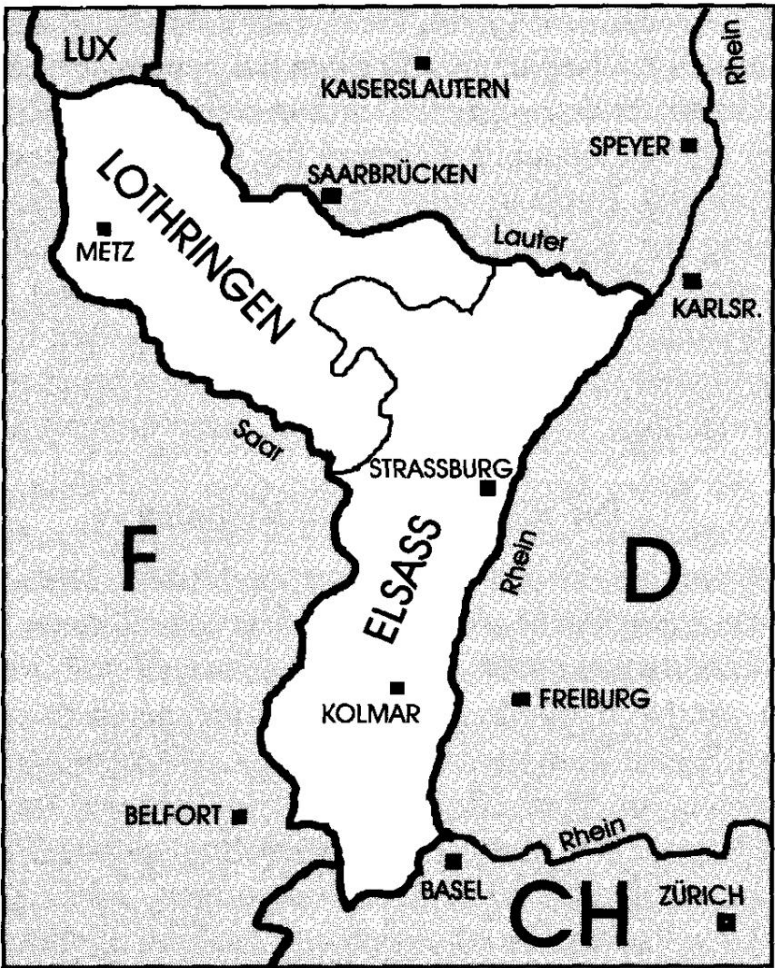
Even after the lost First World War, the vast majority of the German population failed to recognize that their own empire had challenged the self-imposed claim of the more powerful British to be number one in a European power hierarchy. This pre-war British claim lacked moral legitimacy, just as Hitler's later claim to German hegemony in Southeast Europe lacked it. Both claims were justified solely by the Darwinian worldview of the time. Even after the lost war in 1919, Germany refused to accept this and therefore could not understand why the British were so ruthlessly demanding reparations from the Germans in the Treaty of Versailles. The victory of Darwinism over morality, in a sense, paved the way for Hitler's later ruthless foreign policy. The Treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain demonstrated to the German and Austrian people how Europeans were supposed to treat one another.

Franco-German conflicts

The tensions between Germans and French that characterized the relationship between the two nations in 1914 had far deeper roots than those between English and Germans. As early as 1552, the kings of France began to expand their territory eastward towards the Rhine.

Alsace-Lorraine

They exploited internal German conflicts and Turkish pressure on the Reich to annex first the German fortress cities of Metz, Toul, and Verdun, then ten Alsatian cities, then parts of Lorraine, and finally all of Alsace. The German mother tongue of the Alsatian population was no obstacle for the French. However, the French attempt to annex Luxembourg, then part of Germany, failed. During the Thirty Years' War and the War of the Palatine Succession, France seized the opportunities to invade Germany and raze an area 160 kilometers long and roughly the same width in the Palatinate and Baden-Durlach. Villages, fields, vineyards, and towns were burned, including Worms, Bingen, Mannheim, Heidelberg, and Speyer. The French thus created a belt of wasteland intended to prevent the annexation of Alsace from ever being reversed from German soil. The vandalism perpetrated by the French in the Palatinate left the local population with an image of France that, until the Second World War, was remembered as the archenemy. In Northern Germany, it was the French occupation from 1806 to 1813 that, with its high contributions, in-kind taxes, burdened taxes, quartering of troops, and the obligation to participate as vassals in Napoleon's wars, left an unpleasant impression of the French.



Map 1: Alsace-Lorraine

In 1870, France attempted once again to annex Luxembourg (then under the Dutch crown), the Palatinate (today largely Rhineland-Palatinate), and the Saarland, thereby pushing its border eastward. It instigated, declared, started, and lost the war with Germany, paying for it with the cession of Alsace-Lorraine. Germany, in turn, paid with the hatred of the French and with the fact that France now remained a new pretext for war against Germany. The transfer of Alsace-Lorraine between the two neighboring countries always occurred without the consent of those affected. Referendums on affiliation were not yet common practice in 1681, 1766, and 1871. In 1872, the population was given the opportunity to "opt" for allegiance. 10.3% declared their allegiance to France, and 5% emigrated there.³⁴ However, public sentiment in both parts of the country remained pro-French for a long time. Nevertheless, it should be noted that even in 1919, after the forced reintegration of Alsace and Lorraine, France did not dare to survey the affected population about their wishes to belong to France or Germany. This was evidently too risky for the French. A census from 1900 had ultimately revealed that only 11.5% of the inhabitants in the two territories re-annexed by France were French-speaking.

³⁴ Meyers Encyclopedia, entry Alsace-Lorraine

Returning to France before the First World War, France sought allies at the right time to reclaim Alsace and Lorraine when the opportunity arose. In 1892, it formed the so-called Dual Alliance with Russia. In 1912, the President of the Third Republic, Poincaré, assured the Russian government that France would support Russia militarily under all circumstances, regardless of whether Russia was attacked or initiated a war itself.³⁵ Furthermore, in 1904, France concluded the "Entente Cordiale" with Great Britain and in 1911 secured England's promise of military support in the event of war with the German Empire. Thus, France had two powerful allies at its side: Great Britain and Russia.

The rivalry in the colonies

Besides the Alsace dispute, it was the race for the last remaining "open" colonies that poisoned Franco-German relations. The race for colonies was still raging worldwide around the turn of the 20th century. For example, in 1898, the United States of North America annexed the Philippines and Puerto Rico as US colonies. Great Britain annexed the Kimberley diamond mines in South Africa in 1900, and in the same year, Spain seized the Rio Muni province in southern Cameroon. In 1902, England conquered the Boer states of Orange and Transvaal with their rich gold deposits. Japan annexed Korea in 1905. In 1907, Russia declared northern Persia and England southern Persia to be within their spheres of influence, and in 1912, Italy made Libya a colony and Spain acquired two coastal strips in Morocco. In this hunt for overseas territories, France came into conflict with Germany in Morocco. In 1880, the Treaty of Madrid guaranteed the Sultan of Morocco sovereignty over Tangier and Germany free trading rights throughout the country.³⁶ When France attempted to annex the territory of Tangier as well, the German Emperor and the Imperial Government were unwilling to accept this French breach of the treaty and their own disadvantage. Emperor Wilhelm II therefore traveled personally to Tangier and, in consultation with the Imperial Government, protested against the French effort to "peacefully penetrate" all of Morocco, including Tangier, as the French termed it. The result of this intervention in the so-called First Moroccan Crisis of 1904–1905 was a Franco-German treaty that recognized France's "special political interest" in Morocco and granted Germany participation in the country's economic development. However, this compromise was not even a partial victory. The price was too high. Germany, embroiled in the Morocco dispute, which disturbed French circles, slid into international isolation that would not be resolved until the First World War. Germany rightfully insisted on the still-valid Treaty of Madrid, but England and Italy

³⁵ Grenfell, page 84

³⁶ Löwenstein, page 470

They support France's ambitions in Morocco because, in return, they secured a free hand for their own colonial plans. Thus, the compromise regarding Tangier and Morocco remains more of a victory for France.

In 1911, during the Second Moroccan Crisis, already described, France gained another advantage. Under the pretext of needing to restore order during internal unrest, the French government occupied Morocco with its own troops. Paris declared Morocco a French protectorate, which meant nothing other than that Morocco was now also one of France's colonies. What followed has already been partially mentioned in the description of Anglo-German relations. The German gunboat Panther put into Agadir. Germany demanded compensation from France in the Congo and received, in return for the loss of German trade in Morocco, a piece of French Congo, which was annexed to German Cameroon as a border region. This was an insignificant territorial gain three years before the First World War. Of considerable importance, however, was the French anger at Germany's new competition in Africa.

Thus, in France, many reasons were piling up to settle accounts with Germany at the first opportunity. There was the desire to regain Alsace and Lorraine. There was resentment towards their colonial rival, Germany, and there was the concern that their German neighbor might grow even stronger as a land and new naval power. While Germany was aware of the deep resentment the French harbored over the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, the Germans did not feel wronged. Territorial cessions after lost wars were common then—as they still are today. And the conquered population was predominantly German by mother tongue. Before the First World War, at least 1.3 million citizens in Alsace and Lorraine spoke German as their mother tongue, and almost 200,000 spoke French. From a German perspective, therefore, the territories of Alsace and Lorraine were not seen as the cause of the war. The real reason for the war, as was clear to everyone in 1914, lay in the Balkans. The terrible revenge the French exacted on the Germans after the war was therefore met with no understanding in Germany. Hitler would profit from the excesses of this revenge.

Russia's relationship with Germany

The relationship between the three empires of Russia, Habsburg, and Germany is also part of the background to the Versailles and Saint-Germain disaster. Although Russia and Germany were essentially neighbors without mutual territorial claims and although they did not compete in any of their colonies, they nevertheless drifted apart from 1890 onward. This had four main reasons. The first directly concerned German-Russian relations. Berlin failed to terminate a reinsurance treaty that expired in 1890.

to renew ties with St. Petersburg. The other three reasons are indirect.

Germany's enemies seek Russia's support, or Germany supports Russia's enemies. Thus—and this is the second reason—France continues to successfully court Russia as a power behind Germany's back. Thirdly, Germany stands by Austria-Hungary, Russia's rival in the Balkans. And fourthly, Russia's alliance strategy for safeguarding its own interests in the Far East, in Persia-Afghanistan, in the Balkans, and on the Dardanelles, leads this large country, through a series of treaties, into the camp of the enemies of the Habsburgs and the German Empire until the First World War.

The long lead-up to the Russo-German War of 1914 began many years earlier in the Balkans. From 1875 onward, the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire gradually disintegrated. Because the new states that emerged in the Balkans from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire lacked clear ethnic boundaries, this region became a flashpoint in Europe for 40 years. Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia waged numerous wars over borders and territories. The conflicts among the Balkan states invariably spilled over to their neighbors, who fought for their own spheres of influence. Russia, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, Italy, and Greece were typically involved. France, Great Britain, and Germany were indirectly drawn in as mediators and partisans. While Germany generally sided with Austria, the German government nevertheless acted as a mediator in the Balkan crises of 1909, 1912, and 1913. In 1909 and 1913, Germany twice prevented Habsburg from waging war in the Balkans. However, the German government's general support for Austria in all Balkan crises alienated the Russians and French. Ultimately, Germany paid for its commitment to peace with Russia's enmity and increasing isolation among the major European powers.

Russia's path to the First World War was also predetermined by its domestic political situation. The stark social injustices in the still feudal Tsarist state and the separatist movements of the non-Russian nations created a volatile situation that threatened to disintegrate the Tsarist empire from within. Three groups hoped that a new war would resolve Russia's problems in their favor. The non-Russian national movements saw the war as an opportunity for Russia's defeat and thus for the freedom of their peoples. Conversely, the country's high nobility believed that a new war could temporarily unite their empire, which was threatened from within. And then there were the revolutionaries of the class struggle, who wanted to use the war as a pretext for rebellion against the upper middle class and the aristocracy. Thus, there were strong forces in all social strata and ethnic groups of Russia that would welcome a war. In 1914, during the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia over the response to the assassination in Sarajevo, it was the so-called Grand Dukes' Group that pushed for war against Habsburg and the German Empire. Within the Russian army, war with Germany was already a topic of discussion long before anyone had heard of the assassination in Sarajevo.

as one might suspect. Thus, the most widely circulated military journal in Russia, RASWJEDSCHIK, already wrote in January 1914:

"We are all very well aware that we are preparing for a war on the Western Front, primarily against the Germans. Therefore, we must base all our troop exercises on the assumption that we are waging war against the Germans. For example, one side of the maneuvers must always be designated 'the Germans.' Not only the troops, but the entire Russian people must be accustomed to the idea that we are preparing for a war of annihilation against the Germans and that the German states must be destroyed, even if we lose hundreds of thousands of people in the process."

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In contrast, the German army was not prepared for this mood among the Russians shortly before the outbreak of war. In 1913, Chief of the General Staff Moltke the Younger discontinued the annual review of the deployment plans towards Russia because he did not consider them urgent. This was a sign that

Germany has no aggressive plans towards Russia.

Germany as enfant terrible

Germany before the First World War was the enfant terrible among the "adults" of Europe, the terrible child, to put it literally. A child, because the new, the second German Empire of 1871, was only 43 years old at the start of the war. Compared to France, which had already grown into a nation-state under King Louis XIV from 1461 onwards, and to England, the kingdom and nation-state united under King Henry VII from 1485 onwards, this was truly just infancy. The Germans, nevertheless aware of their more than 1000-year history, attempted in these mere 43 years to make up for much of what their old, established neighbors had achieved over centuries.

The Germans are terrible, truly terrible for their neighbors, because their rapid rise to power is truly terrible for them. A naval buildup that is far too extensive for the British liking, and an expansion of the army from 1913 onward, coinciding with that in France, create suspicion and fear among the "old guard," who already possess large fleets and armies of their own. The boom in the now unified German economic area, which pushes England and France to third and fourth place in the world rankings, is a burden for the established competitors. And the political weight with which the German Reich, since Bismarck, has exerted active influence on all disputes and changes in Europe and Africa often disturbs the circles of Russia, Serbia, France, Greece, and England. Added to this is the Germans' clumsiness...

³⁷ Reich Archives, Volume 2, page 17

who did not discreetly conceal their growing strength and newfound self-confidence, but rather made it quite clear to the outside world. Thus, before the outbreak of the First World War, the German Reich was maneuvered into an unfavorable position by its economic rise, its armament, shortcomings in its alliance policy, and also by the Kaiser's clumsy speeches and interviews with foreign powers. The Kaiser's and the Reich government's demonstrable desire for peace was too often drowned out by the Kaiser's staunch pronouncements. When Germany so unhesitatingly sided with the Habsburgs before the outbreak of war, Paris, Saint Petersburg, and London suspected that Berlin's motives extended beyond the conflict in Serbia. They suspected that

Germany wants to use the dispute over Serbia to gain territory for itself. However, there were no hints or indications of this from Germany before the First World War.

The tangle of conflicting interests

Before the First World War, the interests of Russia, Serbia, France, England, Habsburg and Germany intersected along a number of lines.

After losing the war in Asia against Japan in 1904, Russia turned its attention back to its opportunities in Europe. The impending collapse of the vast Ottoman Empire tempted it to once again fight for control of the waterways to the Mediterranean. Thus, Russia was interested in conquering Constantinople and the Dardanelles and supporting the Serbs in their expansion towards the Adriatic. Russia also saw itself as the protector of all Slavs and the Greek Orthodox world.

France wants to erase the defeat of 1870-71 and reconquer Alsace-Lorraine. Furthermore, it aspires to once again become the leading land power on the continent.

England perceives its colonial empire and the trade routes it controls as threatened by German naval expansion. It views the construction of the German Baghdad Railway and the German oil concessions in Iraq as an unwelcome encroachment on an economic zone it had previously considered its own. England could halt German oil production near Mosul and the new railway line there if Serbia, in a war on England's side, were to disrupt the German railway network in the Balkans. And finally, Germany is strategically Britain's number one potential adversary, having caught up with or surpassed France in almost every respect as the leading power on the continent.

Serbia, an independent state since 1878, aims to become the leading power of a new great empire in the Balkans and, to this end, to unite its smaller neighboring countries into "Greater Serbia." A Greater Serbian movement outside the...

Official state authorities promote this expansionist idea through propaganda and repeated acts of terrorism in Serbia's neighboring countries. The Habsburg territories of Croatia and Bosnia are also affected.

Habsburg, as a multi-ethnic state, attempted to undermine the independence aspirations of its non-German member nations, partly through greater autonomy and partly through participation in central government. However, the problem of its multi-ethnic state remained unresolved in 1914. Habsburg, which also included many Slavic nations, could hardly avoid conflicts with Russia, which saw itself as the protector of all Slavs. Furthermore, there was potential for conflict with the Serbs. The Habsburg government had formally annexed the two formerly Ottoman provinces of Herzegovina and Bosnia to its own territory in 1908 and paid for them from the Ottomans in 1909. Both territories had already been under foreign administration by Austria-Hungary for 30 years by international decree. With this acquisition of territory, Serbia's desired expansion towards the Adriatic Sea was effectively blocked.

Germany experienced rapid population growth between 1871 and 1914.

The transition to industrialization meant that Germany was increasingly dependent on imports of food for its population and raw materials for its industries. The new German Reich was thus forced to seek a suitable place in world trade, where the best positions were already occupied. From 1884 onward, Germany's efforts to acquire colonies, expand its share of world trade, purchase overseas mining and oil concessions, and develop the Middle East through railway construction were primarily responsible endeavors to secure the food supply and livelihoods of its rapidly growing population. Secondly, they represented the risky undertaking of establishing itself as a great power like England or France.

Thus, the interests of the six states just described intersect in Alsace-Lorraine, Serbia, the Dardanelles, the Middle Eastern oil fields, and global trade. These interests become a stumbling block and a potential disaster where all the lines converge: in the Balkans. Austria is interested in maintaining the status quo, Serbia in expansion, Russia in Serbia's success, Germany in railway connections to the Middle East, England in Serbia as a barrier to German rail access to Middle Eastern oil, and France in a weakened Germany that can no longer defend Alsace-Lorraine.

The spark of Sarajevo

This short version precedes the description of the long and complicated chain reaction from the murder in Sarajevo to the outbreak of war, in order to provide an overview.

When a Bosnian Serb assassin murdered Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsburg throne, in Austrian Sarajevo in 1914, the situation between Habsburg and Serbia suddenly escalated. The German Empire immediately pledged its alliance to the Habsburgs. The government in Vienna exploited this as a blank check, issuing an excessive number of threats and ultimatums to sovereign Serbia, for whose "benefit" the assassination had been carried out. Serbia sought support from its protecting power, Russia. Russia, in turn, secured the alliance of France. And France, as agreed, could count on the support of England. Thus, shortly after the assassination in Sarajevo, Serbia, Russia, France, and England found themselves on one side, and Austria-Hungary and Germany on the other. In this tense situation, Austria-Hungary sent the Serbs an ultimatum. This was followed by preparations for war in France and Russia. When both countries mobilized their troops and England did the same with its navy, the German Empire was forced to act. However, it later mobilized more quickly and attacked France first. In doing so, the German High Command deployed a portion of its troops through neutral Belgium. England then declared war on the German Empire.

This was followed by declarations of war against Turkey by England, France, and Russia. Next, Japan joined the fray, declaring war on the German Empire in order to acquire Germany's colonies in the Pacific. Italy—initially allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary—switched sides in 1915, also declaring war on its allies in order to extend its borders from the south to the crest of the Alps. This constellation remained until the United States entered the war in 1917. Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Turkey fought against Great Britain, France, Russia, Japan, and Italy. The Balkan countries sided partly with one side and partly with the other.

The chain reaction of July 1914

When Habsburg's heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by a Greater Serbian assassin on June 28, 1914, the whole world was initially outraged and on Habsburg's side. Only the newspapers in Serbia glorified the murder.³⁸ In this situation, Kaiser Wilhelm II assured – as already mentioned –

Austria-Hungary pledged Germany's "unconditional loyalty" to the alliance. While the Emperor was acting in accordance with the treaty, the assurance also sent a false and dangerous signal. Habsburg, initially hesitant to take decisive action against Serbia, now, buoyed by the German assurance, intensified its rhetoric against the Serbian government. However, by this time, the global outrage over the assassination in Sarajevo had largely subsided, and the old alliances between the states were re-emerging.

³⁸ Gebhardt, Volume 4/1, page 42

In Germany, no one initially anticipated the worst. Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, the State Secretary (Minister) of Foreign Affairs von Jagow, the Chief of the General Staff von Moltke, and the Chief of the Naval Command von Tirpitz all began their scheduled leave during this period and left the capital, Berlin.³⁹ None of them seriously believed that this new Balkan crisis could develop into a major war. Neither the army nor the navy were instructed to make any preparations for war. Even the press was asked not to write anything about the threat of war. During this "hot" summer of 1914, there was not the slightest indication of a German intention to wage war.

The situation in England was different. There, preparations were being made quietly in case the Serbian crisis should escalate into war. Naval Secretary Churchill and the First Sea Lord, Prince of Battenberg, ordered a naval mobilization exercise for the period from July 15th to 25th.⁴⁰ This meant that the Royal Navy was already being made ready for war before the spark ignited in the Balkans. At the end of this exercise, there was no demobilization.⁴¹ The fleet remained on standby, ready to embark the promised six army divisions to northern France if necessary. England, far away and not threatened, was preparing its part in the war against Germany even before Habsburg poured oil on the fire with his ultimatum to Serbia, and even before the German Reich mobilized or anyone declared war. The British thus had a 14-day head start on the mobilization of the German naval and land forces. Only two weeks after this unofficial preparation for war, on August 2nd, England officially announced the mobilization of the fleet, thus maintaining appearances.

Vienna, meanwhile, is taking a tougher stance towards the Serbian government. The Serbian government is consulting with the Russian government in St. Petersburg. Amid this tense situation, French President Poincaré and his Prime Minister Viviani are also in St. Petersburg from July 20th to 23rd for a long-planned state visit. Both are using the opportunity to reaffirm the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance of 1894 against Germany.⁴² They assure the Russians of their continued alliance in the event of war. Thus, Wilhelm II's recklessness in declaring his alliance loyalty to the Habsburgs is contrasted with Poincaré's similar recklessness in making such an assurance to Russia.

On July 23, Habsburg issued a 48-hour ultimatum to the Serbs, demanding that they cease all anti-Austrian hate propaganda in Serbia, allow Austrian authorities to participate in the fight against terrorism in Serbia, and allow Austrian officials to attend the judicial investigations of the Sarajevo assassination.

³⁹ Binder, page 48

⁴⁰ Frost, page 22

⁴¹ Note in Churchill's memoirs, page 424; dtv

⁴² Geschichte, page 122

to include murder. The last two demands went too far for the Serbian government. The Russians, now certain that the French would be on their side in the event of war, decided on July 25th to support Serbia. They promised the Serbian government aid. The Serbian government subsequently rejected the Vienna ultimatum with a note that was partly dismissive and partly conciliatory, and mobilized the Serbian army. This was followed that same evening by the partial mobilization of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces against Serbia.

It is the arrogance of power with which the great Austro-Hungarian Empire attempted in 1914 to impose Austrian officials and agencies on the small, yet sovereign, Serbia to combat terrorism. However, the event can also be viewed differently. For the Habsburg government in 1914, it was not enough to prosecute the murder and combat the Greater Serbian movement on its own soil. For Habsburg, it was a matter of survival to break the support base of the movement and the terror within Serbia, just as it was unavoidable for the Americans in 2001 to combat terrorism outside their own country.

The German Emperor's reaction upon receiving the text of the Serbian reply of July 25, 1914, is noteworthy. He judged: "Every cause for war is gone. ... I would never have ... This means ordered mobilization on that basis."⁴³

From July 26th to 31st, Germany and England made several attempts to mediate. London proposed a Balkan conference. On July 27th, Kaiser Wilhelm II tried unsuccessfully to persuade the courts in St. Petersburg and Vienna to compromise. Vienna merely declared that it had no intention of acquiring Serbian territory in this dispute with Belgrade. Despite all German and English efforts, Habsburg declared war on Serbia on July 28th, 1914. Now the court in St. Petersburg also acted. On the 29th, Russia mobilized 13 army corps on the borders with Austria-Hungary. On the same day, the government in London asked the government in Berlin to intervene once more in Vienna. However, the British Foreign Office already indicated that

England intended to remain neutral only as long as France was not involved in the war.⁴⁴ This was the first subtle threat directed at Germany, since Great Britain could not wage a naval war with Austria. England was "ready to go" against Germany, as this early indication of its willingness to fight alongside France revealed. This was the second such threat in three years since the Moroccan Crisis of 1911.

⁴³ Binder, page 49

⁴⁴ Binder, page 42

On July 30th, two opposing impulses emerged from Germany. General von Moltke, Chief of the German General Staff, recognized the military danger that this crisis could pose to the German Reich. If war were to break out and Russia and France were to fight on Serbia's side, it would be vital for Germany's survival that the Austro-Hungarian army be ready for battle and tie down the Russians. Thus, for purely military reasons, von Moltke urged his Austrian counterpart, General von Hötendorf, to accelerate the general mobilization of the Austro-Hungarian troops. On the same day, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg urgently advised the Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Berchtold, to abandon the war with Serbia. And on this same day, Kaiser Wilhelm II once again attempted to dissuade his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II, from war. He earnestly implored him to rescind the partial mobilization ordered the previous day. The Tsar initially complied, but ultimately yielded to the pressure from his Foreign Minister and the pro-war faction within his own country. Now Russia is even mobilizing completely, that is, also against Germany. Now the German side is trying again with even harsher tactics. On July 31, Kaiser Wilhelm II has an ultimatum delivered in Saint Petersburg, demanding that the Russian government withdraw its mobilization orders within twelve hours; otherwise—so the note states—a state of war between Germany and Russia is inevitable. The Russian government does not respond. It has evidently already ordered its troops to attack Germany. On August 1 at 7 p.m., after the ultimatum has expired, the German ambassador in Saint Petersburg delivers the German declaration of war, and at the same time, the first Russian cavalry units cross the German border.

The distance between St. Petersburg and the German-Russian border in East Prussia, and the chain of command between the Tsar's court and the Russian squadron commanders in their assembly areas on the border, were—especially at that time—far too great for an order to attack to have been relayed from one place to the other within one or even a few hours. The order to attack, and thus to begin the war against the still-waiting Germany, was undoubtedly issued in St. Petersburg even before Germany's declaration of war. Thus, Russia started the war, and Germany declared it first. In Versailles, four years later, the German declarations of war were considered a significant part of Germany's sole war guilt. It is therefore no surprise that Hitler learned from this in 1939 and refrained from declaring war.

July 30th was a fateful day. On that day of crisis, Kaiser Wilhelm II failed to coordinate the activities of the cabinet and the military and to commit the Chief of the General Staff to his peace policy. But the general-

⁴⁵ Ploetz, Volksausgabe, page 387

Chief of the Imperial and Royal Staff Count Moltke, acting here without orders from his emperor, correctly assessed the decisions at the Tsar's court. Whether the escalation between Austria and Russia on July 30th at Hötzen Dorf would have been avoided without Moltke's urging cannot be proven or disproven in retrospect. The political die for war had clearly already been cast at the Tsar's court.

With this sudden development on August 1, 1914, Germany unexpectedly found itself in danger of being caught between two fronts. Its two large neighbors to the east and west had been bound to the German Reich by treaty since 1894. A war on two fronts posed an existential threat to Germany, especially since Germany had still not mobilized. The German government therefore inquired in Paris on July 31 how France intended to behave in a Russo-German conflict. The French government stalled, responding ambiguously: "We will act in accordance with French interests."⁴⁶ This could mean peace or war over Alsace-Lorraine. Paris evaded the obvious German desire for continued peace between the German Reich and France and instead prepared for war with Germany. The French government ordered the mobilization of its armed forces on August 1.

Germany is now four days behind Russia's partial mobilization and three days behind its general mobilization. Time is running out. The days in which the Kaiser and the Reich government attempted to mediate between Habsburg and Russia are now lost for Germany's own preparations for war. The German Reich cannot afford to wait any longer. After receiving the bad news from Paris that France would not agree to remain neutral, and after the announcement of the French general mobilization on August 1st, the Reich government also announces the mobilization of German troops. Germany does not have the forces to fight against Russia and France simultaneously. Above all, it cannot do so from a defensive position against two numerically superior enemies.

It cannot wait until one enemy comes "from the front" and the other "from behind." Caught in such a pincer movement, the Germans have only one option: to preempt the two adversaries and attack and defeat them one after the other. Germany could either attack Russia alone first. That would – This was the assessment in Berlin – it would take a long time and expose the weakly defended western border to the danger of a French attack. Alternatively, Germany could first try to defeat France, which they believed could be achieved relatively quickly, and only then turn against Russia. This was the assessment of their own capabilities in Berlin before the First World War, and this was the prevailing view.

⁴⁶ Binder, page 56

The German General Staff has prepared its deployment plans for this worst-case scenario.

That the German General Staff's fears were not unfounded became clear at the beginning of the war, when it emerged that France's troops were not only mobilizing to defend their own country, but also, from the outset, preparing for an attack against Germany with an offensive towards the Upper Rhine.⁴⁷ Since France began mobilizing on August 1st, making preparations for war, apparently waiting for the German troops to march towards Russia, and refusing to declare its neutrality, Germany had to expect that France would strike as soon as Russia made any move. Thus, the worst-case scenario for Germany had come to pass. On August 3rd, Berlin declared war on Paris to avoid later falling into France's trap itself.

Simultaneously with the declaration of war, Berlin inquired in Brussels whether the Belgian government would permit German troops to march through Belgian territory on their way to France. Berlin guaranteed the integrity of Belgian territory and promised to pay all costs of the march to the Belgian state and to compensate for any damages. The Belgian government refused.

The use of Belgian territory for a German mobilization effort in a feared war with France, or even with France and England, has long been considered in all German defense preparations. The General Staff assumes that the British and French, in a war, will not hesitate to advance against Germany through Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Thus, the complex deployment plan for the German army in the event of war has been developed with the inclusion of the Belgian railway network.

This was primarily because the Germans calculated their greatest chances of success against the French army through a northern encirclement along the Channel coast. And the route to northern France leads through Belgium. While this deployment plan of the General Staff was foolish from a foreign policy perspective, and implementing it against the will of the Belgian government was a violation of international law, it promised military success for the protection of Germany, especially given that Germany was simultaneously fighting for its survival on two fronts.

The invasion of neutral Belgium by German troops on August 3, 1914, was preceded by a diplomatic high-stakes game in which London and Berlin prioritized gain over peace. As early as the night of July 28-29, German Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg attempted to gauge England's intentions should the Balkan conflict spread to France and Germany.

⁴⁷ Ploetz Volksausgabe, page 388

should expand. Von Bethmann Hollweg summoned the English ambassador in Berlin, Sir Goschen, and explained to him that Germany wished to maintain peace with England and, in the event of an expansion of the war to France, did not intend to acquire territory at France's expense. Furthermore, von Bethmann Hollweg indicated that, depending on France's actions, Germany might be forced to violate Belgium's neutrality for a limited period.⁴⁸ When asked about England's stance and conduct, Ambassador Sir Goschen replied that his government did not wish to commit itself at this time.

The day after Bethmann Hollweg's conversation with Sir Goschen, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Grey, began a dark double game. He informed the German and French ambassadors in London, one after the other, of England's position. To the German ambassador, Prince Lichnowsky, he told that his country intended to remain neutral only as long as the war was confined to Russia and Austria. However, if Germany and France were drawn into the war, England could no longer remain aloof. He conveyed the same message, albeit in veiled terms, to the French ambassador, Cambon, so that the French government could count on England's military support. In this way, Grey discreetly signaled to France, in typical English fashion, that in the conflict between the Russians, Austrians, and Serbs, it had a free hand to war with Germany. It could—as Grey put it—safely allow itself to be "drawn" into a war.

The following day, the situation for the Germans worsened. On July 30, Russia ordered general mobilization. Due to its treaty with Austria-Hungary, Germany was automatically on opposing sides. France, having a treaty with Russia, was also on opposing sides. London knew that the German Reich was now in a bind and, to save itself, would most likely have to violate Belgian neutrality. This was England's ticket to war. In this German dilemma, on July 31, the British government called on both Germany and France to respect Belgium's neutrality. France immediately assured the British of this. Germany then asked whether England, in turn, would maintain neutrality and peace towards Germany if it refrained from marching through Belgian territory. Now England would have had the power to protect the Belgians from the German advance. But London, which justified its declaration of war against the German Reich three days later with the German violation of Belgian neutrality, was not prepared to stay out of the brewing war for Belgium's sake. At this height of the crisis, Foreign Secretary Grey promised neither neutrality nor peace.⁵⁰ The British government did not want to miss the opportunity to avert German war.

⁴⁸ Stegemanns, page 361

⁴⁹ Stegemanns, page 359

⁵⁰ Stegemanns, page 363

to first defeat the empire in land warfare with the help of the French and the Russians, and then to push it out of the markets, the colonies, and naval construction.

On August 1, 1914, the worst-case scenario for the German side came to pass. War with Russia could not be prevented. The first Russian units were already on East Prussian territory. Mobilization was underway in France, and Germany, caught in a pincer movement, could no longer wait. The imminent existential threat to the Reich forced the Kaiser, the Chancellor, and the General Staff to implement the controversial deployment plan through Belgium, if necessary without Belgian approval.

On August 2nd, the German government issued an ultimatum to the Belgian government, demanding permission to march troops through Belgian territory to northern France. The Belgians refused. Meanwhile, the die had already been cast in London. On that same August 2nd, even before German troops entered Belgian territory, England officially announced the mobilization of its fleet.

However, the fleet had been secretly ready since the mobilization exercise on July 25. On the same day, August 2, the British Foreign Secretary, Grey, informed the French government that the British fleet would come to the aid of the French if the German fleet were to initiate hostile actions against the French.⁵¹ Furthermore, England had already secretly promised the French six army divisions in 1911 in the event of war. Thus, on August 2, Great Britain was already ready for war and committed to a position. As the final touch in this game of intrigue, the following day, August 3, Minister Grey appeared before the House of Commons in London and explained to the evidently unsuspecting members of parliament that England had not yet committed itself in any way to the war beginning in Europe.⁵²

When German troops began advancing through Belgium against France on August 3, London issued Berlin an ultimatum demanding the immediate withdrawal of troops from Belgium. Germany, however, could no longer forgo the passage through the neutral country and continued its deployment. This was followed the next day, August 4, by Britain's declaration of war on the German Reich.

In the seven days leading up to the outbreak of war, England and Germany each made a concession regarding Belgian neutrality, offering a glimmer of hope for peace. However, Germany was unwilling to relinquish its military advantage over France without England's declaration of neutrality, and England, in the end, was unwilling to forgo its chance to participate in a war against Germany. Thus, in just five weeks, the Serbian-Austrian conflict in the Balkans escalated into a Europe-wide war.

⁵¹ Stegemanns, page 366

⁵² Grenfell, page 25

How great the scruples of the German Reich government were about violating Belgium's neutrality was expressed by Reich Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg before the Reichstag

on August 4: *"Thus we were forced to disregard the justified protest of the Luxembourg and Belgian governments. The injustice—I speak openly—the injustice we are committing, we will seek to rectify as soon as our military objective has been achieved. Anyone who is as threatened as we are and is fighting for what is most important must think only of how to survive."*⁵³

The War Guilt of 1914

In 1914, Germany pursued no war aims of its own. However, through Kaiser Wilhelm II's early and unconditional support for Austria, it contributed to the outbreak of war. But after this initial, ill-advised expression of alliance loyalty, the Kaiser and his government successively attempted to dissuade first the Russians, then the French, and finally the British from going to war with each other. Russia refused to demobilize. France declined to reciprocate by leaving Germany in peace, and England had no intention of guaranteeing peace to Germany in exchange for sparing Belgium.

Germany's declaration of war on Russia was the consequence of its futile attempt to force Russia to exercise restraint. The declaration of war on France and the breach of Belgian neutrality were the almost inevitable consequences of the first step taken against Russia. The reasons Germany gave for the First World War ran deeper. These included the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871, economic and trade expansion, the naval construction program, the Baghdad Railway, and the German oil concessions in what is now Iraq.

In 1914, Russia deliberately opted for war. Domestic problems, the chance of gaining the hoped-for access to the Mediterranean in the event of victory, and the assumed patronage over all Slavic peoples led the Russian government to openly support Serbia against Austria-Hungary, to mobilize, and to invade Germany without warning or a declaration of war.

France's war aim since 1871 has been to reclaim Alsace-Lorraine. Before the war, it diplomatically accomplishes what Germany, lacking insight and resources, fails to do. France seeks allies for a conflict that, at some point in the future—so it is assumed in Paris—will involve the German Empire. France is, as it is called, preparing its allies for battle. French alliance policy is inherent in this.

⁵³ Binder, page 62

a volatile situation that exploded in 1914. France, through the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance, held Germany in such a pincer movement that, in the event of tensions and the threat of war with France or Russia, the German Reich was forced to take the first military step if it wanted to avoid the risk of its own demise with any chance of success. France's pincer movement and Germany's forced action could only be resolved in the event of a crisis like 1914 if France or Russia then declared that they would not resort to arms. In the summer of 1914, however, neither France nor Russia wanted to maintain peace. Both had their "prey" firmly in their sights. France's promise to the Russian government in 1912 to provide military support under all circumstances.⁵⁴

Poincaré's visit to St. Petersburg on July 20, 1914, led the pro-war faction in Russia to take a high-stakes stance against Germany at the end of July 1914. France, exploiting Russia's hardline position, which it had itself reinforced, seized the opportunity presented by Germany's request for its own neutrality. Refusing to guarantee peace to the German government, it continued its mobilization and forced the Germans to either deplete their troops in defense against Russia on the French side or to open war with France as quickly as possible. In a truly masterful move, France thus pinned the blame for the outbreak of war on Germany.

England is not directly pushing for war, but it believes it must defend its global market position, its colonial empire, and the naval supremacy that protects both against the growing power of the German Empire. The British government is playing a long-term double game and exploiting the opportunities it presents. London mediates in all crises in Morocco and all Balkan disputes—including in 1914—thus strengthening France's position against Germany. British foreign policy also includes the 1911 pledge to support France against Germany, if necessary with six army divisions, and the assurance of August 2, 1914, that England's fleet will fight on France's side. These two secret assurances of comradeship in arms in a potential war have the same disastrous effect as Kaiser Wilhelm II's "blank check" to Austria-Hungary. France is playing a high-stakes game and risking war over Alsace-Lorraine.

When Germany was caught between Russia and France and asked England for neutrality and the preservation of peace, the British government refused to agree to either. It refused even when Germany offered to forgo its planned march through Belgium.

Instead, England waits until Germany attempts to escape its own threat by attacking northern France, advancing through neutral Belgium. Then England's trap will snap shut. Great Britain

⁵⁴ Grenfell, page 84

declares war on the German Reich because it violates Belgian neutrality.

Thus, England stands in a position that is perfectly sound under international law, even though it consciously and indirectly contributed to the outbreak of war. Great Britain used the chain reaction of rapidly unfolding events in July 1914 to put an end to German competition, the "Made in Germany" label, and the naval construction program in the German Reich.

In 1914, America still maintained a distance from the European power games. The government, Congress, and the population intended to keep their country out of this overseas war. However, even at the beginning of the war, there were influential figures in the states who saw things differently, for example, Mahan and Roosevelt. Admiral Mahan had been influencing the strategic thinking of many politically interested people in the USA for about 20 years,⁵⁵ and Franklin D.

Roosevelt, who would later lead his country into and through World War II, was at the time Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Mahan wrote to Roosevelt two weeks after the outbreak of war, on August

13: *"Germany's procedure is to overcome (its adversaries)*

suddenly through concentrated preparation and impetuous drive. Should the Germans defeat France and Russia on land, they would gain a respite which might enable them to build a naval power comparable to England's. In that case, the world would be confronted with a naval power... full of greedy and expansive ambition."

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The bomb that would only go off against Germany three years later was already ticking in some people's minds.

None of the governments involved in the war in 1914 fully grasped the extent of the European catastrophe to which they were contributing in July 1914. None of the governments—apart from the Belgian one—made a concerted effort to preserve peace. Great Britain and the German Empire repeatedly attempted to mediate between the warring parties. However, the governments and representatives of both countries, through ill-advised promises and secret agreements, encouraged the war-prone states of France and Austria-Hungary to engage in irresponsibly risky actions. France, in turn, led Russia to adopt its intransigent stance. Moreover, France and England consciously and tacitly accepted the war because of the anticipated "collateral damage" it would bring. Both prepared militarily in advance to exploit the emerging German-Russian entanglements for their own benefit without appearing as the aggressor themselves. Austria-Hungary, Serbia, and Russia were steering directly and deliberately toward this war, even if Vienna initially only considered it a punitive action against the Serbs. Thus, the states' share of the blame for the outbreak of this war is...

⁵⁵ Admiral Mahan writes the book "The Influence of Sea Power upon History" in 1889

⁵⁶ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's Road to War, page 564

The First World War differed greatly. In comparison, the burden of responsibility for the catastrophe of 1914 falls least heavily on the British and the Germans.

The future British Prime Minister Lloyd George described the events of July 1914, commented on with the words:

"The nations slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war".⁵⁷

Literally translated: "The nations have slipped into the boiling cauldron of war."

The complex web of motives, misdeeds, and guilt that led to the outbreak of the First World War was fully understood in postwar Germany during the 1920s and 30s. It was therefore inevitable that in 1920, no party in the Reichstag, from left to right, would accept the dictum of "sole guilt" imposed on the German people by the victors. Moreover, the burden of reparations, which the victorious powers justified from 1919 onward with this "sole guilt," so deeply impacted the lives and daily routines of all Germans that the revision of "sole guilt" and the Treaty of Versailles became the declared goal and consensus of all parties and political groups in postwar Germany. Thus, the untenability of the sole guilt thesis led to the collapse of the postwar European order built upon it, ultimately resulting in a new world war within just two decades.

World War I

The First World War lasted four years and pushed France to the limits of its capacity to endure it in 1915/16. The war also exacted heavy tolls on the Central Powers. The governments in Berlin and Vienna seized upon the conquest of Romania by German and Austro-Hungarian troops as a – as they saw it – opportune moment to offer peace to the opposing powers of Russia, Great Britain, and France in December 1916. The offer was vague and spoke of "peace and reconciliation." The opposing states interpreted the offer as a sign that the Central Powers were weakening and responded with demands for "atonement, reparations, and guarantees."⁵⁸

France and Russia also concluded a secret bilateral treaty – presumably to bind each other to certain obligations. In this pact, the two powers secured their war gains for each other. France was to receive the Saar region in addition to Alsace-Lorraine, and Germany west of the Rhine was to be separated from the Reich and become a buffer state under French sovereignty. Russia received

⁵⁷ Lloyd George, page 32

⁵⁸ Gebhardt, Volume 4/1, page 78

This included a blank check to "determine its western borders in complete freedom as it saw fit." After a victory, it would be allowed to annex all of Poland, Constantinople, and the Dardanelles.⁵⁹ Thus, the German peace offer of 1916 not only fell on deaf ears but also exacerbated the greed of both adversaries.

Shortly afterwards, another attempt to broker peace for Europe fails. US President Wilson sends out inquiries to the warring parties regarding the conditions under which the war could be ended. Great Britain and France present unacceptable conditions to Germany and Austria-Hungary, and Germany, regrettably, does not respond further to Wilson's message after its recently failed peace initiative. Instead of seizing the opportunity and utilizing American mediation, Germany risks drawing the US into its submarine war with England.

Since Great Britain is blockading Germany's supply of raw materials and food by sea with a remote blockade of its fleet, Germany is also trying to cut off England from its supplies across the Atlantic.

But this initially fails. Too many British merchant ships, before reaching the contested sea areas around England, take down the Union Jack from their masts and sail unmolested into their ports under the American flag.⁶⁰

Thus, the German High Command placed its last hope of eliminating England and still ending the war victoriously on unrestricted submarine warfare against all of England's maritime supplies. While this submarine war plunged England into crisis, it simultaneously led to a clash with the USA. The United States of America, although officially neutral, provided a large portion of the transport fleet and imported goods for supplying England. Consequently, the "neutral" USA and its ships also fell victim to the German naval warfare against England.

The relationship between the USA and Germany suffered a further setback at this time. When Russia withdrew from the war as a defeated nation in 1917, the possibility of a victory by the Central Powers—Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey—could no longer be entirely ruled out. This would have had consequences for the USA. England and France, having exhausted their own national finances, had completely financed their war costs through American banks.

Had Germany and Austria-Hungary won, the war financing provided by England and France would have become a lost loan, burdening the US economy. The prospect of becoming the financial loser of a foreign war, the unrestricted German submarine warfare, and an ill-advised attempt by the German government to offer support to Mexico, which was already at war with the US, all contributed to the decision to withdraw from the war.

⁵⁹ Nitti, page 67 and Franco-Russian Treaty of 11 March 1917;

⁶⁰ Gaffney, page 174

The 1917 coup de grâce led the American government to officially join the war on the side of Great Britain and France. On April 6, 1917, America declared war on the German Empire. The declaration of war against Austria-Hungary followed a few days later.

Germany's and Austria-Hungary's forces are dwindling. Their opponents' forces will now steadily increase due to the influx of fresh American troops.

By October 1918, 30 US divisions had arrived in Europe and decided the course of the war.

Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey, all on their side, no longer had any chance of turning the tide. At the beginning of 1918, while German troops were still undefeated in France, US President Woodrow Wilson proposed a peace settlement with harsh but acceptable terms, the so-called "Fourteen Wilson Points."

The US government consulted with the British and French on this peace proposal, but did not bind them to it. As a result, the governments in London and Paris later felt no obligation to adhere to President Wilson's conditions.

The burden of propaganda

The peace negotiations that will now follow are burdened not only by the victors' subjective views on the reasons for and causes of this war, but also by another factor. The governments and media in England, France, and the USA had conducted public relations campaigns to convince their voters and soldiers of the war's purpose and to persuade them—as the war intensified—to hold out. The arguments used to "learn" to the masses in France, Great Britain, and America that they stood for right and good against wrong and evil were quite diverse. This kind of "enlightenment" began in England, where the London Times, in its August 27th edition, reported just over three weeks after the outbreak of war: *"that a man saw with his own eyes how German soldiers chopped off the arms of a baby clinging to its mother's skirt."*

On September 2nd, the TIMES published a second such report: *"They are cutting off the little boys' hands*

so that France will no longer have any soldiers."

⁶¹ Binder, page 96

⁶² Binder, page 100



Fig. 1: Propaganda image against German soldiers

Since then, propaganda about the "bloodthirsty Hun" has flourished in the three aforementioned countries. Figurines of children with severed arms outstretched, postcards of German soldiers plunging bayonets into babies' wombs, reports of nuns' rapes, and the like inflamed British, French, and Americans against the German "Huns" and "Teutons." However, an investigation commissioned by the Pope in the war zone failed to uncover a single such case. Francesco Nitti, Prime Minister of Italy from 1919, described in a book four years after the war how France, England, and Italy circulated the most absurd fabrications to awaken the fighting spirit of their people. He wrote:

"One had to win, win at any cost. ... To win, one must above all hate, and to hate, one must inflict everything hateful on the enemy. ... At that time, the Germans were portrayed as barbarians of culture, as the root of all human evil. There was no cruelty they weren't accused of, and if they weren't shooting defenseless women, they were hacking off children's hands. ... Above all, the legend of the severed children's hands during the war was exploited ... as irrefutable proof of the German Hunnic nature. ..."

Not that any serious people believed all these legends, but it was still useful to spread them. ... Immediately after the war, I wanted to verify the truth of all these accusations and commissioned several of my friends to conduct the necessary research.

according to time, place, and name. Lloyd George had the same thought and, during his travels in Belgium, interrogated every possible witness about the horrific amputations. But neither he nor I succeeded in confirming even a single case as fact." The drumbeat against Germany did not cease even when German troops marched out of

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France and Belgium in 1918 to prepare for a peace settlement. The British needlessly dropped bombs on the French cities of Saint Quentin, Roulers, Douai, and Cambrai and spread the word that the Germans were deliberately and systematically devastating the French territories they had occupied during their retreat.⁶⁴

The Atlantic Ocean posed no barrier to British propaganda against the Germans. The British, using false information, immediately extended their war to the still-neutral United States after the outbreak of war. Their naval resources and the shared language between England and the US proved particularly helpful. The Royal Navy severed German telecommunications cables on the Atlantic seabed, disrupting communication between Germany and America. This allowed England to establish a monopoly on the press and public opinion in the US, at least as far as the European war was concerned. England flooded the US with its perspective and its propaganda image of Germany. Sir Gilbert Parker, an English journalist, laid this bare in Harper's Magazine in March 1918. He writes, *"Practically with the outbreak of war, I became responsible for British public relations in the USA. ... We distributed 360 English newspapers to US magazine publishers. We established contacts with English soldiers, arranged interviews, and distributed our written materials to a large number of public libraries, YMCA meeting places, universities, colleges, clubs, and historical societies."*

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A Lord Northcliff also runs a foundation in the USA bearing his name, employing 4,500 "publicity agents." Thus, the people in the USA, and later American soldiers, are influenced by an image of Germany that persists well into the Second World War.

When Woodrow Wilson prepared the American public for the US entry into the war in 1917, he too resorted to portraying the Germans as the enemy of the world, of the good and the just. He described the German U-boat war as a "war against all nations" and made it a "challenge for all mankind." Wilson called on the world to "sweep away the irresponsible and anti-democratic governments" and coined the catchy slogan *"The world must become safer for democracy."*

⁶³ Nitti, pages 39 to 56

⁶⁴ PAAA, Secret Files War 1914, R 21872, Page 224

⁶⁵ Gaffney, page 10

What the average American hearing this message doesn't know, and couldn't have known in 1917, is that democracy in their own country wasn't as developed as it was in the German Empire at that time. The democratic United States only introduced universal, equal, and secret suffrage with the Voting Rights Act in 1965. In the German Empire, which Wilson so vehemently denigrated, this right had existed since 1871.

Wilson, too, resorted to self-deception, portraying his opponents in a negative light, depicting them as a danger to humanity and as evil forces. From then on, America demonized its adversaries in every war. Media and entertainment films blanketed the USA with a propaganda image of "the Germans" that persisted, in part, until World War II. The film "The Prussian Cure," for example, shows a scene in which German soldiers crucify a captured Canadian at a gate. Such fantasies stuck.

The extent to which self-created delusions are rampant in the USA is shown by the minutes of the US Congress meeting of January 10, 1918. There, the following prayer is recorded, with which the representatives began the day: *"The session is opened at 11 a.m. Pastor S.*

*says the following prayer: 'Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we thank You and rejoice that this government is founded on faith in You and Your Word. ... You know, O Lord, that we are engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the most dishonorable, vile, avaricious, envious, bloodthirsty, lustful, and depraved nation that has ever offended the book of history. You know that Germany has caused so many tears of mankind that a new sea could be filled with them. We pray to You that You will bar Your mighty arm and cast back the horde of hungry, wolfish Huns,' From whose fangs fresh and clotted blood flows. ... Bless our allies and may victory be ours. ... You shall be praised forever through Jesus Christ. Amen. (The transcript of the debate follows.)*⁶⁶

The political elites of England, France, and America could no longer descend from this mountain of hatred and self-deception when they were supposed to conclude peace with Germany in 1919. Thus, Versailles, Saint-Germain, and Trianon were not only about a new peace order for Europe. According to the prevailing propaganda logic, they were now also about revenge and punishment.

⁶⁶ Congressional Record, Containing the Proceedings and Debates of the Second Session of the Sixty-Fifth Congress of the United States of America-Volume LV I – Washington-Government printing Office 1918, Page 761, 762

The Treaty of Versailles and the ostracism of Germany

In early 1918, US President Woodrow Wilson gave the first impetus for a peace settlement that all warring parties could accept. On August 8th...

In January, he delivered a speech to the Congress in which he developed a 14-point proposal for such a peace settlement.⁶⁷ Nine of the fourteen points were significant

for the German Reich. These were: 1. the abolition

of secret diplomacy, 2. freedom of the seas,

3. future arms limitations,

4. the settlement of the collective claims

of the Western Allied powers, i.e., the Entente, 5. the evacuation of Russia by the Central

Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, 6. the restoration of Belgium, 7. the return of

Alsace-Lorraine to France, 8. the

establishment of an independent Poland with free

and secure access to the Baltic Sea, and 9. the founding of a League of Nations.

His proposal ends with the following sentences:

“ We are not jealous of German greatness, and there is nothing in this program that diminishes it. ... We do not wish to injure Germany or in any way to impede its legitimate influence or power. ... We do not wish to fight Germany, either with weapons or hostile methods of trade, if it is prepared to join us and the other peace-loving nations in treaties of justice, law, and fairness. We only wish that Germany should occupy a place of equality among the peoples, rather than a place of hegemony. ...⁶⁸

In a further speech before Congress on February 11, Wilson added that any peace settlement should not include territorial concessions or annexations against the will of the populations involved. He explicitly excluded arrangements “which will, in time, disturb the peace of Europe and thus of the world.”⁶⁹

As the strategic situation of the German Reich deteriorated dramatically from August 1918 onwards, becoming completely untenable in September, the Supreme Army Command urgently called upon the Reich government on September 19th and several times thereafter to begin armistice negotiations with the enemy states. The Reich government and the Army Command were persuaded by Wil-

⁶⁷ PAAA, Files War 1914, R 21923, Pages 12-14

⁶⁸ Wilson Papers, pages 538 f

⁶⁹ PAAA, R 21923, Sheet 14

The moderate Fourteen Points might lead some to hope for acceptable peace terms. On October 3, the governments of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey sent their ceasefire offers based on the Fourteen Points to US President Woodrow Wilson, whom they saw as the spokesman for their opposing powers.

On October 10, the reply arrived.⁷⁰ Wilson did not initially offer a ceasefire. He inquired whether this German offer constituted acceptance of his Fourteen Points of Peace. He intended—as Wilson continued—to propose an armistice to the allied governments, but demanded that German troops first withdraw from the occupied Belgian and French territories. This, according to Wilson, was the prerequisite for a subsequent "good relationship of trust." Following Wilson's reply, the German Imperial government could assume that the Fourteen Points were to form the basis of a peace settlement. It could also hope for a "good relationship of trust" upon the withdrawal of all troops from the occupied territories. Nevertheless, an armistice was not yet guaranteed by the other side. The Imperial government trusted Wilson's offer and its conditions, withdrew its troops from France and Belgium, and began disbanding them at home.

In its reply, the German government once again invoked Wilson's Fourteen Points and expressed the hope that, in addition to the USA, the other opposing powers would also adhere to them.⁷¹ In the two weeks leading up to November, Wilson issued two letters reiterating new demands, which the German government accepted each time with a note.⁷² In his letter of October 23, for example, Wilson stipulated that the USA and its allies would only negotiate a peace settlement with Germany if elected representatives, and not "military rulers and monarchical autocrats," were sent by Germany for this purpose.⁷³ If Germany did not send elected representatives, he stipulated, negotiations could not take place. Germany would then have to surrender. The German government promised the elected representatives and sent them to Versailles in 1919. Nevertheless, peace was not negotiated. As will be described later, it is dictated to him, and the defeated German Reich has to surrender despite having complied with the conditions.

In the following weeks of October, the army command and the government learned from numerous press and intelligence reports how far apart the British, Americans, and French views were regarding an armistice and peace. The British and French initially still wanted to conquer Belgium, but

⁷⁰ Note from the US government dated October 8, 1918: PAAA Secret Files War 1914, R 21872, pages 35 and 36

⁷¹ PAAA, R 21872, pages 164 and 165, note of October 12, 1918; notes of October

⁷² 14, 20, 23, and 27, 1918. See Contract Ploetz, pages 32–35; Contract Ploetz, page 34

⁷³

The Belgians and Americans are resisting this. The French are eager to invade Alsace and Lorraine as victors, so as not to acquire both regions as part of a peace settlement thanks to Allied military aid. The British and Americans prevent this. The French also want to exploit the German troops' self-disarmament to occupy Germany with their own forces.⁷⁴ Furthermore, congressional elections are scheduled for October 5th in the USA. Wilson's opponents reject his negotiating tactics with the Germans and intend to repeal the Fourteen Points if he wins the election.

To reassure the Germans and continue to encourage them to make peace, Wilson issued the following statement on November 5, 1918:

*"The Allied Governments ... declare their readiness to conclude peace with the German Government on the basis of the peace terms laid down in the President's address to Congress of January 8, 1918."*⁷⁵

Wilson thus pretended that the governments of England and France had also accepted his 14 points.

On November 5, 1918, four days before the official armistice negotiations began, Wilson explicitly stated that the Allies intended to conclude peace on the basis of the Fourteen Points. Under international law, this amounted to a preliminary peace treaty, which now needed to be formalized in a final treaty. The armistice negotiations began on November 9, 1918, in the Forest of Compiègne, northeast of Paris.

The chief negotiator on the Entente side is now the Frenchman Marshal Foch, and no longer the American Wilson.

Meanwhile, the Austrians, Hungarians, Turks, and Bulgarians had also concluded an armistice with the victors, and revolution was beginning in Berlin. The German negotiating position had thus become extremely weak. The Entente delegates were not adhering to Wilson's Fourteen Points and were adding new demands. The German delegation could no longer threaten to resume fighting. Therefore, their only option was to accept the expanded demands of their opponents for a 36-day armistice. The most important of these demands were:

1. the evacuation of the occupied territories within 15 days, 2. the evacuation of Germany west of the Rhine with additional bridgeheads on the east bank near Mainz, Koblenz and Cologne,
3. the unilateral release of prisoners of war, 4. the annulment of the previous peace treaties with the defeated states of Russia and Romania,

⁷⁴ PAAA, Secret Files War 1914, R 21882

⁷⁵ PAAA, Secret Files War 1914, R 21882, Page 185

5. the delivery of large quantities of railway trains, trucks and war materiel and 6. the internment of the German High Seas Fleet in the sea area off Scapa Flow north of Scotland.⁷⁶

By accepting these conditions on November 11, 1918, Germany relinquished its weapons and leverage. Consequently, it was no longer in a position to negotiate in the upcoming peace talks. It was at the mercy of the victors and could no longer invoke Wilson's Fourteen Points. Furthermore, limiting the armistice to only 36 days meant that the victors could raise new demands with each extension of the truce.

On January 18, 1919, the so-called Versailles Peace Conference began near Paris. Only the foreign ministers of the 27 victorious powers met there. The French Prime Minister, Clemenceau, chaired the conference. Despite Wilson's letter of October 23, Germany's "elected representatives" were not permitted to participate in the talks. The basis of the Versailles deliberations was not, as initially assumed by the German side, Wilson's Fourteen Points. The victors negotiated solely about their war aims, that is, the division of their spoils. Germany suffered heavy losses as a result. Germany was spared greater sacrifices than those demanded in the Treaty of Versailles only because England managed to prevent France from gaining too much power and because US President Wilson curbed the greed of the other victors. In April 1919, the Versailles Conference even threatened to collapse.

Marshal Foch demanded the creation of a Rhineland state separate from Germany. He insisted that the victors permanently occupy this state with an international army, to which the USA should contribute a contingent of 100,000 soldiers.⁷⁷ Wilson found the barrage of demands from Paris excessive; he left the conference, returned to the USA, and Congress refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles.

Other demands were also spared Germany due to the objections of England and the USA. The Poles and the Czechs had demanded more German land than they ultimately received. France offered the Emsland region to the Netherlands, but the Dutch, who had not participated in the war, remained fair and declined. Even a sovereign country from the victorious camp almost fell victim to the spoils. Negotiations were underway regarding whether Luxembourg would be annexed by France or Belgium.⁷⁸

On May 7th, the conditions set by the 27 winners will be presented to the German delegation for the first time. The Frenchman Clemenceau will hand them over.

⁷⁶ Contract-Ploetz, pages 36 f

⁷⁷ Nevis, page 435

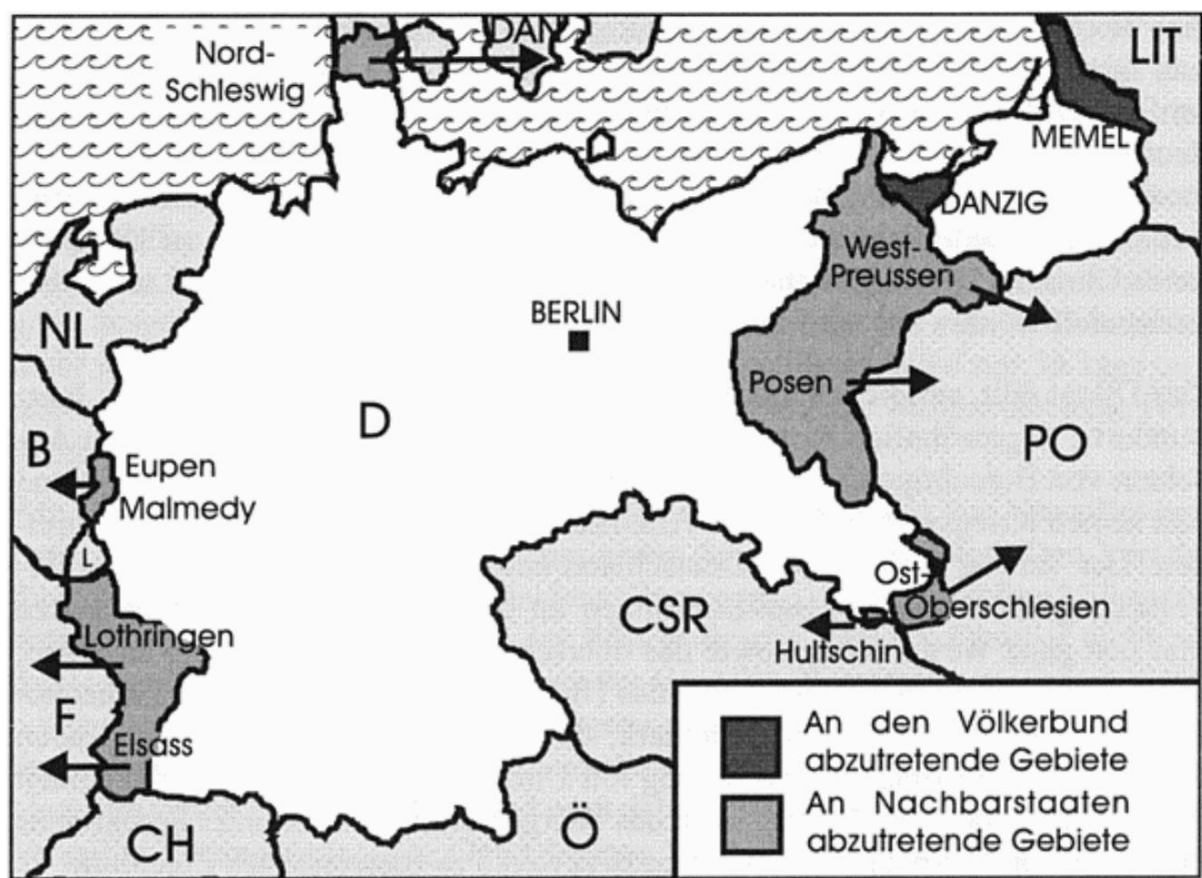
⁷⁸ Nevis, page 368

The words: "The hour of reckoning has come." "Reconciliation" instead of "just and fair treaties," as Wilson had proclaimed exactly five months earlier to persuade the German Reich to agree to an armistice. The German delegates' request to negotiate the "treaty" they were now to sign was rejected. Through several written notes, the Germans only managed to secure a few minor improvements in Germany's favor. The fact that the Treaty of Versailles was dictated rather than negotiated would remain its great flaw.

The dictated terms were unusually harsh compared to the European peace treaties of the 19th century. To lend legitimacy to the scale of their demands, the victors went so far as to assign sole blame for the First World War to Germany and its wartime allies. The treaty required Germany to cede a large number of territories and populations: Alsace-Lorraine to France, the provinces of Posen and almost all of West Prussia, as well as the Upper Silesian industrial region, to Poland, the Memel Territory to the League of Nations, the Hultschin Region to Czechoslovakia, North Schleswig to Denmark, the area around the two towns of Eupen and Malmedy to Belgium, and Danzig and its surrounding area as a Free City under the authority of the League of Nations. The treaty placed the Saar region under French rule for 15 years and transferred the mines there into French ownership.

It forbids the annexation of the remainder of Austria to the German Reich. It establishes occupation zones on German territory west of the Rhine, in which Belgian and French troops are to be stationed for 5, 10, and 15 years, respectively, in three zones. With the treaty, Germany loses its colonies, primarily to England and the British Dominions, but also to France, Belgium, and Japan. The treaty strips Germany of sovereignty over its inland waterways and air superiority within its own borders. The armed forces are reduced to 100,000 men in the army and 15,000 in the navy. Air force, submarines, and heavy artillery are henceforth prohibited for Germany, and a 50-kilometer-wide zone east of the Rhine is closed to German military activity. The German Reich must hand over the majority of its merchant fleet and gold reserves to the victors, along with a large portion of its annual ore and coal production, lime, cement, and gasoline output, vast quantities of livestock and agricultural machinery, 150,000 railway cars, and many thousands of locomotives and trucks. All German private assets abroad and countless industrial patents will be confiscated. The amount of the monetary payments—as the victors reserve in the treaty—will be determined later.

In the German Reich, people are dismayed and deeply disappointed. The "victors" had ultimately not achieved victory before the armistice, even though they had come close. All the belligerent states except America were



Map 2: German territorial losses after the First World War

The Germans were exhausted and desperately needed this peace. Their war losses were at least a third higher than their own. German troops were still stationed in France, and not a single French or British soldier had advanced into Germany. Only Germany had made concessions toward the peace settlement since the armistice, withdrawing its troops and beginning to disband them. In his Fourteen Points speech, Wilson had spoken of "German greatness" and of "treaties of justice, law, and fairness." Thus, the Germans could have expected open negotiations and a decent peace, all the more so since the American president had assured them of a peace based on his Fourteen Points just four days before the armistice.

In Germany in 1919, the way the country treated the French in the Treaty of Frankfurt of 1871 was still all too well known. France, which had instigated and lost the war of 1870, had to cede the predominantly German-speaking Alsace-Lorraine and pay five billion francs in silver within three years. Afterward, the German occupying troops withdrew. France retained its army, its navy, its colonies, and its gold reserves. A single example illustrates just how stark the difference was between the two peace treaties of 1871 and 1919. In Article 2 of the

In the Treaty of Frankfurt, the Germans guaranteed the continued possession of the French Alsations. Article 74 of the Treaty of Versailles, however, stipulated the expropriation of the German Alsations. Remembering the peace treaty the Germans had concluded with the French in 1871, the now-defeated Germany of 1919 was appalled by the excessive nature of these demands. The parties in the Reichstag initially rejected the dictated terms unanimously. Reich President Ebert (SPD) stated the day after the peace terms were delivered:

"The sincere desire for peace of our long-suffering people found its first response in exceptionally harsh armistice terms. The German people laid down their arms and honorably upheld all the obligations of the armistice, however difficult they were. Nevertheless, our adversaries continued the war for six months by maintaining the hunger blockade. The German people bore all burdens in reliance on the promise made by the Allies in their note of November 5th that peace would be a peace of justice based on Wilson's Fourteen Points. What is now being offered to us in the peace terms contradicts this promise, is intolerable for the German people, and cannot be fulfilled even with the mobilization of all our strength."

Unrestrained and limitless violence is to be inflicted upon the German people. Such an imposed peace would inevitably breed new hatred between nations and, in the course of history, new killings. ..."

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But the power of the victors compels them to sign. England threatens to resume the blockade of German ports, preventing the import of food and raw materials into Germany and Austria-Hungary, if the treaty is not signed. Despite the armistice concluded in November 1918, England had maintained its wartime naval blockade until mid-May 1919, thus permanently violating the armistice until then. The British government had also rejected the request of the German Imperial government to at least exempt wheat, fats, condensed milk, and medicines from the embargo during the armistice.⁸⁰ As a result, they complain

By March 1919, Germany and the remainder of Austria had already suffered nearly one million deaths from starvation. Given the widespread famine, neither country could risk a resumption of the British naval blockade just two months later. Furthermore, France threatened to occupy the now largely demilitarized Germany with troops. In this desperate situation, the German delegation in Versailles, under duress, signed the treaty on June 28, 1919.

A cover note to the treaty initially presents the victors' perspective. It reads: *"In the opinion of the Allied and Associated Powers, the war that broke out on 1 August 1914 was the greatest crime against the*

⁷⁹ Binder, page 120

⁸⁰ Deighton, page 26

*This is the most serious crime against humanity and against the freedom of nations ever committed by a nation claiming to be civilized. For many years, the rulers in Germany, true to the Prussian tradition, have striven for hegemony in Europe. ... Germany's conduct is almost unprecedented in the history of mankind. The terrible responsibility that rests upon it can be summed up in the fact that at least seven million dead lie buried in Europe, ... Therefore, the Allied and Associated Powers have emphatically declared that, as a fundamental condition of the treaty, Germany must undertake a work of reparations to the utmost limit of its capacity. ..."*⁸¹

With this ominous note, the "Allied and Associated Powers" expel the Germans from the community of civilized nations. This will have consequences.

The Treaty of Versailles, besides its ruthlessness, contains four particular articles that will prove to be a boomerang for the victorious powers. First, there is the preamble. It begins with the sentence: *"The United States of America, the British Empire ...*

(followed by a list of the other victorious powers) on the one hand, and Germany on the other ... have agreed upon the following provisions: ..." This "agreement" is based on the pure coercion of the stronger power. Defeated Germany did not "agree" here, even though it was now forced to sign it. The misleading word at the beginning of the treaty is intended to conceal the fact that this is a completely one-sided declaration of intent by the victors.

Such practices were no longer common or practiced in the major peace treaties following the Napoleonic Wars and – as already mentioned – after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. It represents a relapse into a time when only the self-interest of the stronger parties, and not compromise between the warring factions, was the norm in peace settlements. When Adolf Hitler, 20 years later, treated the defeated parties in the same way, it was accepted in Germany as "paying back in kind" without much scruple.

Secondly, Article 8 of the Treaty of Versailles stipulates that all signatories – including the victors – must reduce their armies to a minimum. Article 8 also stipulates that the German Reich must disarm first, and that this is a prerequisite for the reduction of the fleets and armies of the other states. Article 8 would later be – as the victors could have anticipated –

to the boomerang, which initially hits the Germans, but eventually hits them themselves.

After Germany disarmed in 1927, the victorious powers refused to fulfill their own obligations and reduce their fleets and armies. This caused widespread outrage in Germany. The German Reich governments initially demanded that the victors follow suit with troop reductions.

⁸¹ Treaty of Versailles

When these efforts proved fruitless, they demanded the right for Germany to rearm to a reasonable extent and thus bring the small Reichswehr somewhat in line with the size of the victors' armies. However, this could not be achieved through negotiation before Hitler's election as Chancellor. When Hitler cautiously and then vehemently rebuilt the Wehrmacht in 1933, it initially fit all too well into the framework of what the victors themselves were able to afford. Until 1937, there was therefore hardly any reason in Germany to suspect that Hitler's rearmament efforts were motivated by an intention to wage war soon. Article 8 of the Treaty of Versailles caught up with the victors under Hitler.

Thirdly, Section 5 of Part III of the treaty will have consequences. This part of the treaty stipulates that Germany must cede Alsace and Lorraine to France. It is not the territory itself that is at issue here, but rather the principle of "pacta sunt servanda" (agreements must be kept), which is being violated.

The Treaty of Frankfurt, which ended the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, stipulated that both territories would henceforth belong to the German Reich in perpetuity. This perpetuity lasted less than 50 years. Here, the Entente powers demonstrated that treaties only last as long as the stronger party adheres to them. This also influenced the sense of justice among the public and the military in Germany. When Hitler himself ruthlessly broke treaties almost two decades later and openly proclaimed his actions, Germany was no longer particularly shaken. It was seen as a coarsening of international customs, for which Germany itself was not responsible.

Article 231 will have consequences for the Entente powers. The victorious powers justify their exorbitant reparations demands in the treaty by citing the sole guilt of Germany and its allies for the war. Article 231 states:

"... that Germany and its allies are responsible for all the losses and damages suffered by the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals as a result of the war imposed on them by the attack of Germany and its allies."

In Germany, however, Kaiser Wilhelm II's attempts in July 1914 to preserve peace through mediation and negotiation are not forgotten. People also remember the mobilizations in Russia and France that forced Germany to act, the Russians' refusal to call off their troop mobilization, and the failure of the British and French to guarantee neutrality and peace to their German neighbors. The assertion of sole guilt on the part of the Germans and their allies is so brazen that outrage at the victors' mendacity and the deeply wounded pride felt in Germany know no bounds. The reactions reflect this.

Reich Minister of Justice Otto Landsberg (SPD), one of the German delegates in Versailles says what many in defeated Germany are thinking:

"This peace is a slow murder of the German people." The verdict is often no different, even abroad. State Secretary Lansing from the US delegation at Versailles commented on the treaty in a memorandum dated May 8, 1919, as follows:

*"The impression the peace treaty makes is disappointing. It evokes regret and despondency. The peace terms appear unspeakably harsh and humiliating, while many of them seem impossible to fulfill. It may take years before these oppressed peoples are able to throw off their yoke, but as surely as night follows day, the time will come when they dare to try. We have a peace treaty, but it will not bring lasting peace because it is founded on the shifting sands of self-interest."*⁸²

William Bullitt, diplomat and member of the American delegation in Versailles, requests in writing that his president be recalled from the conference.

In his letter of May 17, 1919, he writes: *"The unjust*

decisions of the Versailles Conference concerning Shandong, Tyrol, Thrace, Hungary, East Prussia, Danzig, the Saarland, and the abandonment of the principle of freedom of the seas make new conflicts certain. ...

Therefore, I consider it my duty to advise my own government and my own people neither to sign nor to ratify this unjust treaty." The United States of North America consequently refused to sign the dictated treaty and⁸³

concluded its own peace treaty with Germany in 1921.

In a memorandum dated March 26, 1919, before the treaty was handed over to the Germans, the British Prime Minister Lloyd George noted:

"Injustice and arrogance, displayed in the hour of triumph, will never be forgiven or forgotten. For this reason, I am most vehemently opposed to removing more Germans than absolutely necessary from German rule in order to subject them to another nation. I can scarcely imagine a stronger cause for a future war..."

The British signed the treaty despite this early realization. Their lust for plunder and consideration for their partner France were evidently stronger than their own voice of reason. However, even belated realization did not prevent the British governments from repairing the damage caused by Versailles themselves in the period up to 1933. The British economist Keynes, advisor to the British delegation in Versailles, had already assessed the treaty in his 1920 book "The Economic Consequences of the Peace Treaty" as

⁸² Hobby, page 121

⁸³ Bernhardt, page 40

"an attempt to enslave Germany and a web of Jesuit interpretations used to disguise intentions of plunder and oppression."

Even the future British Prime Minister Winston Churchill commented on Versailles in his memoirs: *"The economic provisions of the treaty*

were so malicious and foolish that they obviously lost all effect. Germany was condemned to pay absurdly high reparations. ... The victorious Allies still assure us that they will squeeze Germany dry until its cores crunch. All this exerted a tremendous influence on world events and on the mood of the German people."

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Francesco Nitti, the Italian Prime Minister at the time of the conclusion of the Versailles Conference of Victors, remarked: *"Never has a*

serious and lasting peace been founded on the plundering, torment, and ruin of a defeated, let alone a vanquished, great people. And this, and nothing else, is the Treaty of Versailles."

Nitti, who did not personally negotiate the treaty, repeatedly described it in a 1923 book as a crime against the Germans.

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In France, it is the socialists who disapprove of the severity of the treaty.

When the Treaty of Versailles was debated in the National Assembly on September 18, 1919, Deputy Jean Longuet, speaking on behalf of the Socialist faction, said: *"This treaty cannot in any way receive*

the approval of the Socialist Party. It is the product of perhaps the most scandalous abuse of secret diplomacy. It openly violates the right of peoples to self-determination."

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"It enslaves entire nations and creates new dangers of war." It is astonishing that the victors, despite such insight, still shaped the treaty in this way. The Treaty of Versailles is so obviously based on falsehood and injustice that it provides the National Socialists with a constant campaign issue from 1928 onward. This will later cost the victors blood and tears.

It should also be added that Wilson's speeches after the First World War were published in German. Interestingly, the weighty sentences from his significant Fourteen Points speech were omitted from these German editions.

"We do not wish to harm Germany or in any way hinder its legitimate influence or power. We do not want to fight Germany, neither with weapons nor with hostile methods of action, if it is prepared to cooperate with us and the other peace-loving countries."

⁸⁴ Churchill World War, pages 13f

⁸⁵ Nitti, page 14

⁸⁶ Rassinier, page 206

to join nations in treaties of justice, law, and fairness. We only wish that Germany occupies a place of equality among nations, instead of a place of dominance.

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These sentences are also missing later in other German-language publications.⁸⁸ This somewhat obscures for the German reader after the First World War the extent of the deception inherent in the Treaty of Versailles.

The first episodes of Versailles

The burdens imposed on the Germans by the Treaty of Versailles are so extraordinary, and the subsequent concessions from the victors are so meager, that – Among other reasons, the young democracy in Germany is failing. The compulsory levies on machinery, food, coal, fertilizers, and foreign currency are leading to the impoverishment of large segments of the population and affecting them so directly that any party or politician promising a solution or relief can count on a boost in public hope and electoral success. The Nazi Party will profit from this. The population in the Ruhr region, for example, who live on the coal seams, must freeze in winter. The coal, barely extracted, is immediately transported to France.

The reparations also lead to anger and resentment among the victors. The German Reich not only has to provide large in-kind contributions as reparations. It must Gold and foreign currency in amounts the Reich cannot raise. Since Germany's economy is severely weakened by territorial cessions, the loss of 75 percent of its iron ore reserves, the separation of the coal and industrial regions in Upper Silesia and the Saar, and the surrender of machinery, locomotives, motor vehicles, and merchant ships, the foreign currency needed for reconstruction can only be raised through foreign trade and dumping on the world market. German companies must undercut those in England and France, leading to disruptions and further resentment towards Germany in those countries. Furthermore, there is a perception abroad that the Germans are deliberately keeping their economy in disarray to demonstrate their insolvency.⁸⁹

The amount of the monetary payments was not determined until 1921. On March 3, at a conference in London, the victors initially demanded 269 billion gold marks from Germany, payable in 42 annual installments until 1963. The demand-

⁸⁷ Wilson's Documents, Volume III, page

⁸⁸ 42, e.g., in ODSUN Documents, page

⁸⁹ 480; Taylor, page 62

The demand must be accepted within a period of only four days. However, given the currency devaluation at home, this immense sum of money is already worth 3 trillion paper marks and can no longer be repaid. The German Reich government responds to the London ultimatum with a counter-proposal, which the victors, however, consider completely inadequate. Consequently, on March 8, 1921, they occupy the cities of Duisburg, Düsseldorf, and Ruhrort – despite the concluded "peace" of Versailles – and threaten to resume the hunger blockade of 1919 and also occupy the Ruhr region with troops. Thus, the Reich government has no choice but to accept. Meanwhile, the victors' reparations commission has recalculated the total amount of monetary demands at 132 billion gold marks plus 26% of German export earnings.⁹⁰ Added to all this are the not inconsiderable maintenance costs for 140,000 occupation troops.⁹¹ England and the USA are trying to moderate French demands, but France hopes that if it can no longer pay, it will be able to permanently occupy the left bank of the Rhine in Germany and keep it under its own sovereignty.⁹² From May 1921, the press in France promotes the idea of taking over the Ruhr area with French engineers and military personnel.⁹³

After the enormous government spending on the war had already severely devalued the currency, the outflow of foreign currency without any corresponding economic value finally destroyed the German currency. From January 1923 onward, Germany was gripped by hyperinflation. The country could no longer pay its reparations in cash, and coal deliveries to France fell behind schedule. Consequently, French Prime Minister Poincaré ordered the occupation of the Ruhr region by troops on January 11, 1923, and the confiscation of all mining operations for France. Belgium also participated in the occupation of the Ruhr with its own troops.

The German delivery delay in 1922 amounted to 24 million gold marks worth of timber and coal. However, the deliveries and payments made in the same year totaled 1.478 billion gold marks.⁹⁴ Thus, the reason the French used as a pretext for the "cold conquest" of the Ruhr was a shortfall of only 1.6% of the annual payment due.

The German government is outraged that the French are marching troops into the Reich despite the Treaty of Versailles. It calls on the population to offer "passive resistance." The trade unions respond with a general strike, and in many cities, miners refuse to hand over their mines to the French. In Essen, French soldiers shoot fourteen workers who attempt to resist the confiscations.

Hundreds of German men who oppose the French will

⁹⁰ Gebhardt, Volume 4/1, page 228

⁹¹ Kern, page 71

⁹² Taylor, page 39

⁹³ Nitti, page 71

⁹⁴ Gebhardt, Volume 4/1, page 239

Deported to France and the colonies. 80,000 Germans are expelled and forced to leave the Ruhr region on French orders.⁹⁵ Bitterness grows in Germany. In France, outrage increases at the "defeated" Germans, who had first signed the Treaty of Versailles and now failed to uphold it.

In November 1923, hyperinflation in the German Reich came to an end. One trillion paper marks had become one Rentenmark. Since France was now almost as exhausted as Germany and in need of sound finances, the so-called Dawes Plan was brokered in 1924 through American mediation. According to this plan, Germany had to pay 1 to 1.7 billion marks annually in reparations, and from 1928 onward, 2.5 billion marks annually, initially indefinitely. Renegotiation was to take place after 1928. Germany initially paid for four years, largely with foreign loans taken out from private banks in the USA. In return, the French and Belgians vacated the occupied Ruhr region in 1925. In 1929, following another conference, the so-called Young Plan stipulated that reparations for the First World War would amount to approximately 2 billion marks per year until 1988. In addition, a further three-quarters of a billion marks per year, payable to the victorious powers, was to be levied on the German Reichsbahn as a form of hidden reparations.⁹⁶ After the Reich government had guaranteed the payment of this money, the occupation troops were also withdrawn from the Rhineland, four years ahead of schedule at Versailles.

On October 24, 1929, "Black Friday," stock prices on Wall Street in New York City first plummeted, followed by a severe economic crisis. As a consequence, US banks demanded immediate repayment of the short-term loans that Germany had used to pay its reparations.

The German banking and credit system could only withstand the withdrawal of foreign currency until mid-1931. No more loans were available for industry and small and medium-sized businesses in Germany. The number of bankruptcies and company collapses rose sharply in 1930 and 1931, and with it, the number of unemployed people. By the end of 1931/beginning of 1932, the number of unemployed exceeded 6 million.

At the request of Reich President von Hindenburg and through the mediation of US President Hoover, German reparations payments were suspended for one year. In 1932, the victorious powers formally resolved the reparations issue at a conference in Lausanne. The remaining reparations could now be settled with a one-time payment of 3 billion Reichsmarks. However, this did not cover or settle the total debts that had since grown from the reparations previously paid to America. Germany is

⁹⁵ Binder, page 132

⁹⁶ Bernhardt, page 67

Initially unable to pay the 3 billion as the "final installment," plus the foreign loans in the USA and the interest, the German Reich negotiated annually with the Bank for International Settlements for a deferral of its obligations.

In 1953, after the Second World War, the issue of reparations for the First World War was revisited. The repayment of the remaining debts was renegotiated in the so-called London Debt Agreement, insofar as West Germany was required to contribute its share. Following the reunification of the two post-war German states in 1990, the remaining debt was settled. The reunified Germany then paid the GDR's share. Thus, the Federal Republic of Germany committed itself to repaying the remaining debts from the First World War reparations and the interest thereon in installments until 2010.⁹⁷

Today, in post-2000 Germany, such payments for the First World War are no longer a significant issue, not even in their symbolic meaning. Yet in 1920, the Treaty of Versailles possessed an immense explosive force that destroyed the young Weimar Republic from within. The plunder of defeated Germany, decreed at Versailles, the expulsion and unemployment of millions, and the resulting hardship led, after ten hopeless years, to the radicalization of broad segments of the population. The tragic outcome was the end of democracy in Germany in 1933, a democracy that the victors had previously denied any chance of survival.

The subjective view of peoples

The Treaties of Versailles, Saint-Germain, Trianon, and the other Paris Peace Treaties transformed Europe and America into a world of mostly dissatisfied nations. In France, there was outrage at Germany, which refused to honor the signed treaty. There was fear of losing their newfound hegemony on the continent "in the next round."

Thus, the French are attempting to transform the state of emergency following Germany's defeat into a permanent state of affairs. They refuse to disarm themselves and are once again encircling Germany with a series of military agreements.

In England, the territorial gains of Versailles were appropriated, and from then on, there was a greater inclination to keep France, the new "first" power of the continent, in check. Thus, England's attitude towards Germany in the first years after the war was initially cautiously friendly. However, the British had helped at Versailles to keep Germany occupied and weakened by creating numerous conflict zones along almost all of its borders. All these conflict zones, such as the

⁹⁷ Federal Ministry of Finance, November 27, 1996

The Saarland, the Rhineland (now stripped of its German military presence), Eupen, Malmedy, Danzig, Memel, West Prussia, and Upper Silesia resurfaced on the agenda a few years after Versailles, much to the British chagrin. Each time, these territories presented London with the choice of denying the right of nations to self-determination or finally yielding to defeated Germany. Since the British governments failed to resolve any of these issues on their own, the Germans—and Hitler in particular—were left with fertile ground for future successes.

The system of the post-war order, which the British had helped to botch, collapsed in 1939 when they failed to address and solve the problem of Danzig itself in a timely manner.

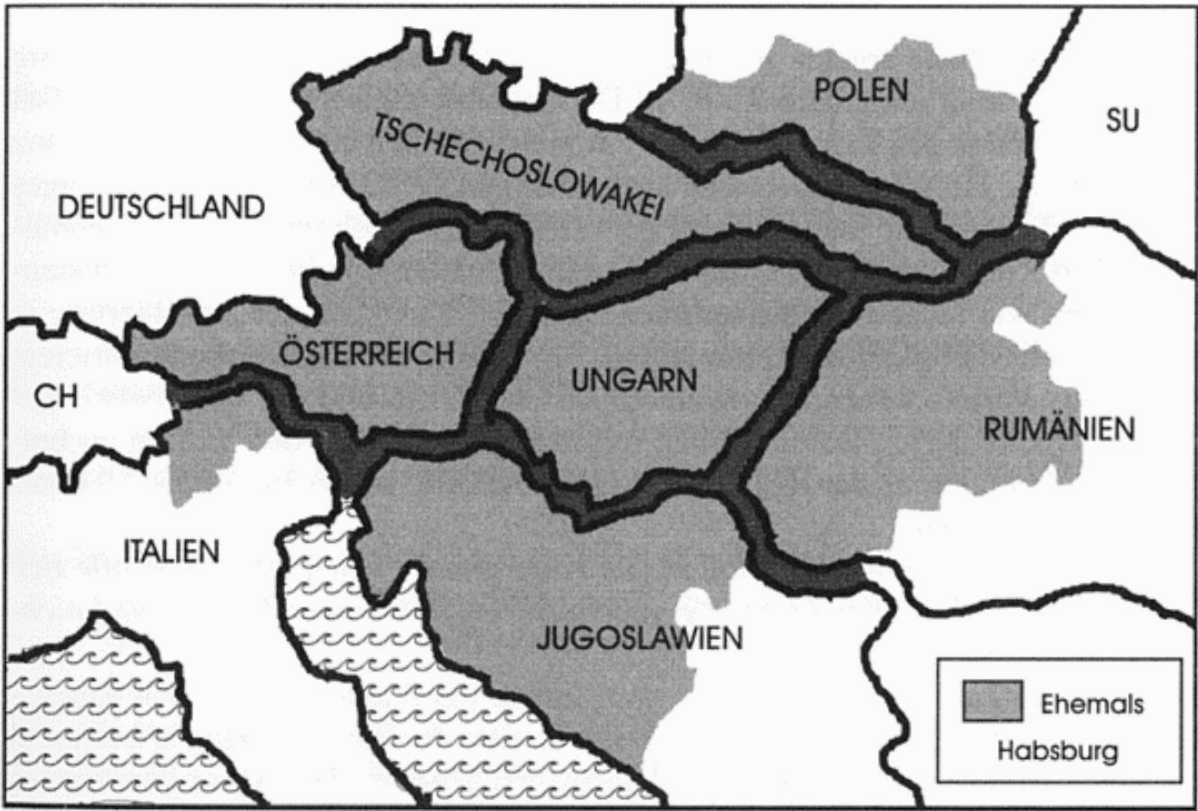
The United States profited handsomely from World War I through arms and munitions deliveries to England and France, war loans to both countries, and loan agreements for German reparations. Nevertheless, the outcome of the peace was a source of profound disappointment. President Wilson had justified the US entry into the war by arguing that it would make the world safer. In the final year of the war, Wilson had called for a peace conference where victors and vanquished would negotiate as equals. He had also proposed a forum for all nations to preserve a more just world under equal rights for all: the League of Nations. The victors' conference at Versailles and the dictated terms that resulted from it so fundamentally contradicted Wilson's earlier visions that the US refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles. Furthermore, France and Great Britain so brazenly used the League of Nations to cement Germany's current inferiority that the US refused to join it after its founding. Woodrow Wilson's disappointment with his former allies and with this "peace" was so profound that shortly after Versailles he decided and ordered a significant modernization of the US Navy. Wilson did not trust the peace.

The Polish elite was also dissatisfied with the results of the Versailles negotiations. The Polish delegation had claimed further territories in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and the German Reich from the victors, but did not receive them. Thus, the Poles took matters into their own hands and, between 1920 and 1938, conquered and annexed territories beyond their allotted borders in Lithuania, Russia, Germany, and Czechoslovakia.

Another consequence of the Paris Peace Treaties was the emergence of three new multi-ethnic states in Europe. In Poland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, Poles, Serbs, and Czechs celebrated their newfound freedom and their right to national self-determination. However, in their search for national identity and unity, these three titular nations attempted to impose their language, customs, and way of life on the other ethnic groups within their new states. Thus began difficult times for the newly formed minorities of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Austrians, Hungarians, Albanians, and Macedonians.

Montenegrins, Croats, Slovenes, Ruthenians, and Slovaks. The independence aspirations of the many minorities in Czechoslovakia and Poland formed the easily flammable ground on which these two multi-ethnic states burned to the ground in 1939.

Post-war Austria and post-war Hungary, now both independent of each other, are mere remnants of their former pre-war grandeur. Both nations are forced to cede large parts of their territory, and thus millions of their citizens, to their new neighboring states. This, the post-war hardship, and the accusation of sole guilt for the past war, so closely resemble the problems and situation of Germany that both states will once again become the natural allies of the German Reich in the future.



Map 3: Dissolution of the Danube Monarchy

Post-war Germany is so strangled by reparations in money, in kind and in kind that the hardship is clearly noticeable for everyone in the country.

Added to this are the losses of territory and people. The expulsion of 7 million people from the German Reich and the borders of new states separate millions of families indefinitely. The psychological burden of war guilt adds another layer to the hardship, separation, and displacement. Four years after 1914, the population still vividly remembers how, shortly before the outbreak of war, the Kaiser and government attempted to aggravate Russia and

to deter France from war. Thus, Article 231, which assigns sole blame to Germany and its allies, is viewed by the vast majority of Germans as a politically motivated lie used to justify the exorbitant reparations. Another factor is also having an effect. The invasions and attacks by troops from France, Belgium, England, Lithuania, and Poland in the 1920s, against which the German Reich, with only 100,000 of its own soldiers, is virtually helpless, demonstrate to everyone that Germany must rearm to defend itself. Since the Treaty of Versailles is a clear violation of Wilson's five notes and peace offers, it is regarded by politicians and the military as nothing more than a gigantic fraud that does not require compliance, nor does it require Germany to remain permanently defenseless. Based on past experience, it is concluded that neither good nor fairness can be expected from foreign countries in the future. This sentiment persists until the next war begins.

Territorial losses initially played only a secondary role in the political discussions of the postwar years. In Germany, almost no one desired another war. However, the political parties across the Reich, from the far left to the far right, and the population itself strove for a general revision of the Treaty of Versailles. When the victorious powers offered virtually no substantial concessions to the German Reich, and thus to the democratic forces of the young republic, on this issue for ten years, public confidence in the democrats' ability to act diminished. It was the radical workers' parties, the Communist Party and the National Socialist Workers' Party, who benefited from this. Both campaigned on the promise of breaking the treaty. In the KPD's central organ, "Die Rote Fahne" (The Red Flag), on the 24th...

August 1930 should be read as a program:

"We solemnly declare that, in the event of our seizure of power, we will declare all obligations arising from the Treaty of Versailles to be null and void."

Thus, the number of seats won by the two radical left-wing parties increased dramatically after the 1930 Reichstag elections. The seats won by the bourgeois parties and the Social Democrats declined accordingly. The Treaty of Versailles poisoned the political culture in Germany, shattering the international customs for dealing with defeated nations that had gradually become civilized over the previous century. It created pretexts for many new wars throughout Europe.

The smell of burning in Europe

Since Versailles, Saint-Germain, and Trianon, Europe has reeked of a new war. The victors have punished the vanquished without offering peace in the sense of reconciliation and compromise. They have primarily served their own interests, elevating the power of the stronger to the sole norm, and often...

The self-proclaimed right of peoples to self-determination has been nullified, creating more new minority problems than it has eliminated old ones.

Furthermore, the victors, by a majority vote, did not keep their promise to disarm later. Thus, the treaties create a fait accompli and a climate in which many astute Europeans and others see no chance for peace. This is reflected in many commentaries from the early postwar years.

Friedrich Ebert 1919:

"From such an imposed peace there would inevitably come new killing."

US Secretary of State Lansing, 1919:

"We have a peace treaty, but it will not bring lasting peace." British Prime Minister Lloyd

George, 1919: *"I*

can scarcely imagine a stronger cause for a future war."

The Dutch envoy Swanderen to an English colleague:

"The peace terms of Versailles contain all the seeds of a just and lasting war."

English MP Kneeshaw at the Labour Party conference in 1920:

"If we were the defeated people and such conditions had been imposed upon us, we would have begun in our schools and homes to prepare our children for a war of revenge." Italian

Prime Minister Nitti, 1923: *"Never has a serious and lasting peace been founded on the plundering, torment, and ruin of a defeated people."*

British General and historian Fuller in his book "1939-1945":

"Thus the dragon's teeth were sown, from which a conflict even more devastating than the one that these treaty violations ended would arise."

Fuller's breach of contract refers to the unfulfilled 14 Wilson points. Even French Marshal Foch, who had led the Allied armistice delegation in Compiègne only shortly before, prophesied: *"This is not peace. This is a 20-year armistice."*

Although an armistice prevailed for the next 20 years, it only feigned a new peace order. In reality, unrest and discontent were brewing in Europe. The Communist International, the Comintern, announced at a conference on January 10, 1933, three weeks before Adolf Hitler became German Chancellor, what the next few years would be about:

"The Communist International welcomes the struggle of the Polish Communist Party for the right of free self-determination of the population of Upper Silesia and the Polish Corridor until secession from Poland, and for the right of the population of Gdańsk to voluntary union with Poland."

Germany. It welcomes the struggle of the French Communist Party for the right of self-determination of the people of Alsace-Lorraine until their secession from France, and for the liberation of the Saar region from imperialist occupation. It welcomes the struggle of the Belgian Communist Party for the right of self-determination of the Flemish people and the population of Eupen-Malmedy until their⁹⁸ secession from Belgium.

⁹⁸ Kern, page 83

PART 2

THE YEARS OF THE CONNECTIONS

The years of connections

The referendum in the Saar

German military sovereignty in the Rhineland

The annexation of Austria

The background; The German-Austrian rapprochement; Post-war Austria; Dr. Schuschnigg's "referendum";
The reunification

Stresa, Abyssinia and the Rome-Berlin Axis

America in the background

The annexation of the Sudetenland and the subjugation of Czechoslovakia

The historical roots of Czechoslovakia; Czechoslovakia as a multi-ethnic state; The Sudeten Germans; German intervention in the Czech
Sudeten crisis; The escalation by England and France; Chamberlain's first attempt at mediation and Beneš's proposal for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans; Roosevelt's rescue attempt; The Czechs' capitulation; The meeting in Bad Godesberg from September 22 to 24, 1938; Beneš's Soviet plan; The Munich Conference from September 29 to 30, 1938; The Vienna Award of November 2, 1938; Kristallnacht on November 9, 1938; The misconception of a "free hand in the East"

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia
The Czech Republic becomes a protectorate
The guarantee that never existed
The cause of the Second World War

The return of Memel

The open colonial question

THE YEARS OF THE CONNECTIONS

The victorious powers of the First World War gave Europe a new territorial order that did not last long. With the dismantling of the Habsburg and Ottoman multi-ethnic states and the shrinking of the German Reich, new states emerged, some torn from their historical context, some burdened with the problems of the multi-ethnic state itself, and some carrying with them dreams of becoming great powers, thus shattering the new order.

With the Treaty of Versailles, Germany lost a considerable number of German-populated regions on the fringes of the former German Empire. Austria remained only as a rump of the Habsburg Empire, with the German-speaking core of the former multi-ethnic state. The new Poland assumed control over two million Germans. The newly created Czechoslovakia included over three and a half million German Bohemians, who had called themselves Sudeten Germans since the beginning of the century. The legacy of Versailles also included the evacuation of German troops from several German border regions.

In postwar Germany and postwar Austria, parliaments and governments have been attempting since 1919 to regain sovereignty within their own borders, to enforce the people's right to self-determination, and to rebuild their foreign defense capabilities. The disputes surrounding the order left behind by the victors characterized the 1920s, without any significant progress being made. The efforts of the German Reich to maintain its defense capabilities and the victors' refusal to fulfill their obligations under the Treaty of Versailles to disarm their own armies are reserved for a later chapter of this book. However, it should be mentioned here that the British, French, Poles, Czechs, Belgians, and Italians themselves undermined the Versailles attempt to embed the postwar order within a Europe-wide disarmament framework before Germany even began to shed the shackles of Versailles in 1933.

In the 1920s, the victors failed to voluntarily amend the Versailles settlement in a way that would have been acceptable to Germany, Austria, and Hungary. Instead, they left it to the three defeated countries to do so themselves. Thus, the Saarland was reintegrated, the Rhineland was occupied by German troops, and Austria, the Sudetenland, and the Memel Territory were annexed by Germany. None of this was a voluntary concession by the victorious powers. Rather, it was the initially gentle, and later harsh, pressure from Germany that changed things. But, as the saying goes, the pitcher goes to the well once too often. The victors, who did not give of their own accord but only yielded under duress, gradually realized that their victory of 1918 was no longer enough.

slipping through their fingers. When Germany, under Hitler, stripped Czechoslovakia of its independence in 1939 and declared it a protectorate, the cup shattered even before the last vestiges of Versailles had been completely repaired. When Germany occupied Czechoslovakia, a new perspective forced itself upon the victors. In retrospect, they viewed the occupation of the Rhineland and the annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland as Germany's long preparation, first for hegemony in Europe and then even for world domination.¹ The victors' fear of this prevented the annexation of Danzig in 1939 and the resolution of the transit route issue via the Pomeranian Corridor by mutual agreement between the new Poland and the German Reich. Thus, examining the years from 1935 to 1939 is essential to understanding why the dispute over Danzig, over the annexation of a single German city, so quickly and effectively led to a new world war.

The referendum in the Saar

The first Anschluss fell, so to speak, into Hitler's lap. During the victors' conference in Versailles, the French Prime Minister Clemenceau repeatedly assured everyone that the Saarlanders were of French descent and, insofar as they were of German origin, wished to become citizens of France.²

At least, that's how the French historian and politician Jacques Benoist-Méchin notes it in one of his books. Despite the French firm resolve, their intention to annex the Saar region also failed to gain a majority in Versailles. The Russians, who had promised them the Saar in the secret treaty of 1917, were no longer present in Versailles. And US President Wilson and British Prime Minister Lloyd George did not agree with Clemenceau's annexation of the Saarland, including its population and mineral resources. As a compromise between the three major victorious powers, the Saarland was initially placed under the administration of the League of Nations for 15 years. Only then, following a plebiscite, would it be decided whether it would remain French, independent, or German in the long term. A five-member, internationally appointed "Saar Commission" was to govern the Saarland during these 15 years on behalf of the League of Nations. The Saar Commission was chaired by a French president. It soon proved to be the sole representative of French interests. This did not change even when the Canadian and German members of the commission left the body in protest. The situation in the Saarland only worsened further, to the detriment of the affected population. France effectively ruled the Saarland as its new ruler. The protests of the established...

¹ Lord Halifax, for example, speaks before the House of Lords on March 20, 1939, about "Germany's ambitious plans for world

² domination" (Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 257).

The population, on the instructions of the French on the commission, is as a rule not even referred to the responsible League of Nations.³ The government in Paris, in violation of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, deploys 5,000 French soldiers to the Saar region.⁴ The German civil service is largely expelled and replaced by French officials. The same happens to the German management of companies in industry and mining in the Saar. However, in 1935 the 15-year Saar Statute comes to an end, and France must tolerate the plebiscite stipulated in Versailles in 1920. Thus, the fact of the plebiscite in the Saar is not due to Chancellor Hitler's efforts.

In the months leading up to the vote, a fierce election campaign raged in the Saar region, where the French administration held the home-field advantage, while the German Reich had no direct access. The French campaign was deliberately waged against National Socialism and the new injustices in the German Reich. Emotions ran high, and the plebiscite threatened to descend into violent clashes.

The German head of government, Hitler, then proposes to the French government that the future of the Saar be settled through a friendly agreement between the two governments and that the referendum be waived.⁵

His proposal was to reintegrate the Saar region into the German Reich and to regulate, through an economic agreement, that French industry could continue to exploit the Saarland's mineral resources as before. The French government rejected the proposal, interpreting it as Hitler's admission of Germany's poor chances in the election.

On January 13, 1935, elections were held under the supervision of the League of Nations. 90.8 percent of Saarlanders voted for annexation to the German Reich, 8.8 percent for Saarland independence, and 0.4 percent for union with France. This election, held outside German territory, undoubtedly took place without German manipulation or coercion. And, thanks to the French campaign theme of "National Socialism in Germany," it appeared not as a decision for Germany and against France, but as broad support for the new national socialism of German Chancellor Hitler. Thus, the French handed Hitler a domestic political triumph with far-reaching consequences, more profound than they anticipated. For Hitler, this first annexation since the defeat of 1918 became a plebiscite for the "movement."

On March 1, 1935, sovereignty over the Saar region reverted to the German Reich. On this occasion, Hitler delivered a government declaration to the Reichstag in which he solemnly renounced Germany's claim to Alsace-Lorraine and established the newly drawn border between the Saar and the German Reich.

³ Nitti, page 115

⁴ According to the Treaty of Versailles, Part III, Article 50, Annex, § 30, the Saar territory was to be kept free of military presence.

⁵ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 259



Fig. 2: Election campaign before the Saarland referendum

The Anschluss definitively recognized France and Germany. France thus legally lost a first piece of its Versailles spoils. And Hitler – almost undeservedly – achieved his first domestic political success through the Anschluss.

German military sovereignty in the Rhineland

The next "shackle of Versailles" that Hitler casts off is the demilitarization of the German Rhineland. The Treaty of Versailles obligated Germany to keep the Rhineland, including the Palatinate on the left bank of the Rhine, and a 50-kilometer-deep zone on the right bank of the Rhine stretching from Switzerland to the Netherlands, free of its own troops and fortifications.

In 1921 and 1923, despite the now-established "peace," France and Belgium exploited this unprotected border to "punish" Germany for unpaid reparations, occupying first Düsseldorf and Duisburg, and then the entire Ruhr region with five army divisions. Nevertheless, in 1925, the German Reich government reaffirmed this demilitarization of the German border region towards France in the Pact of Locarno, in order to secure German membership in the League of Nations and the withdrawal of French occupation troops from the "Cologne Zone."

. At the same time, the states of France, Germany and Belgium mutually guarantee the course of their common borders, and they agree that in the future "they will under no circumstances resort to an attack or an invasion or to war against each other"⁸

The détente between France and Germany hoped for at Locarno did not materialize. France expected Germany, in gratitude for its admission to the League of Nations, to henceforth strictly adhere to the Treaty of Versailles. Otherwise, it blocked the equal rights of Germans within the League of Nations as best it could. Germany, on the other hand, expected French concessions after the final renunciation of Alsace-Lorraine, particularly regarding the burdens of Versailles. Thus, Locarno remained only a brief, rosy dream of Franco-German rapprochement between the two wars. This is the first part of the prehistory to the German occupation of the Rhineland in 1936.

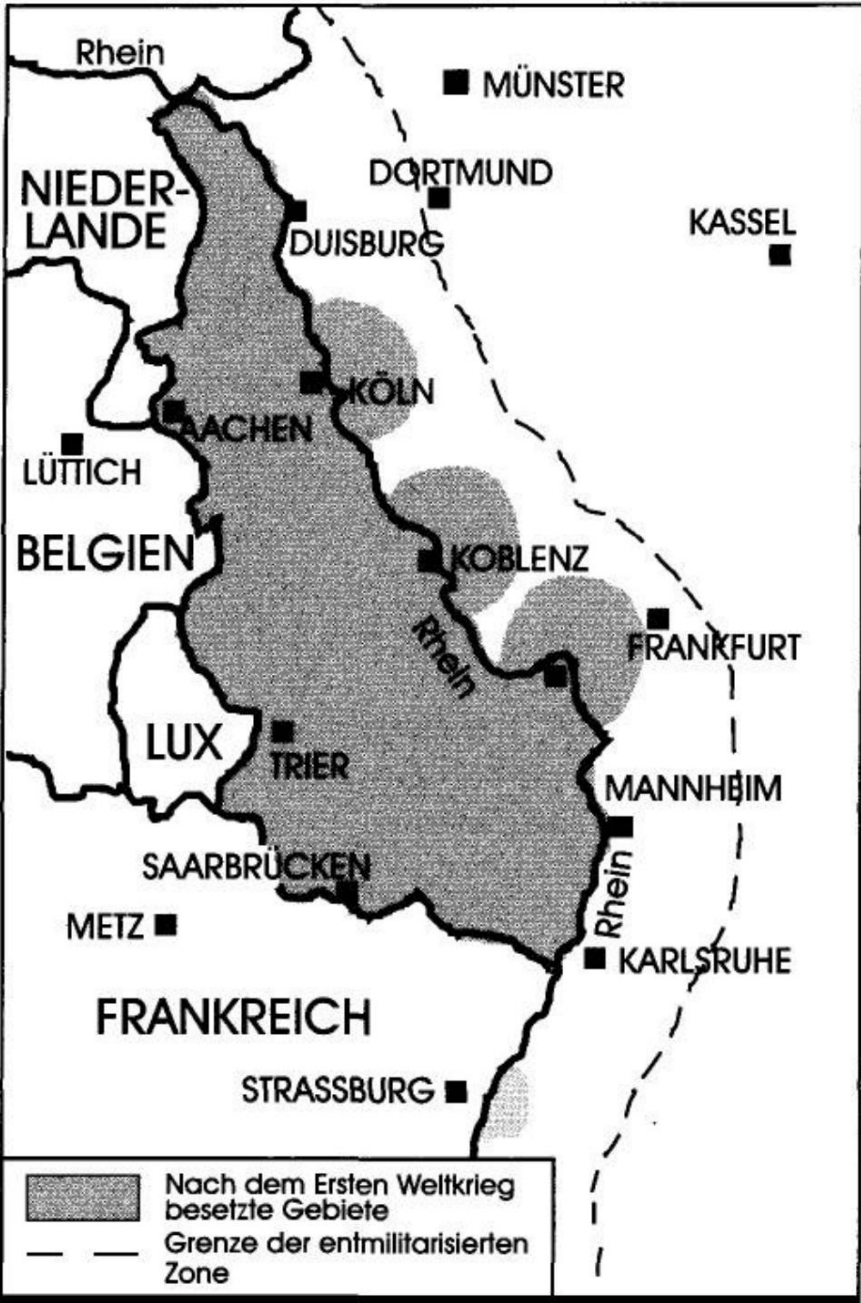
The second part begins with a Franco-Russian treaty. In 1935, France and the Soviet Union replaced an expiring 1932 non-aggression pact with a new Pact of Friendship and Mutual Assistance.⁹ This pact

⁶ Locarno Security Pact of 16 October 1925, between Germany, the UK, France, Belgium, Italy, Poland and Czechoslovakia Closed. Also known as the Rhine Pact.

⁷ According to Article 429 of the Treaty of Versailles, the Jülich-Düren-Cologne-Bonn zone was to be evacuated by the occupying forces in May 1924. This did not happen.

⁸ Article 2 of the Locarno Treaties, French-

⁹ Soviet Treaty of 2 May 1935



Map 4: The demilitarized Rhineland

However, there is an additional protocol in which the Soviet Union and France pledge their military assistance even if one of the two countries is attacked by a third country, and—this is the special feature—even if the League of Nations does not recommend such military assistance.¹⁰ This allows the Soviet Union and France to reserve the right, in the event of a conflict with third-party states, to decide on their own authority who the aggressor is. Since the Soviet Union, which has by then re-armed itself considerably, cannot expect to be attacked by the small Baltic states or by the military

¹⁰ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 278. This additional protocol is omitted from the Ploetz treaty.

Given the risk of Romania being attacked, the pact only makes sense in a war with Germany. However, France had committed itself in Locarno to refrain from any further military operations against Germany, except in self-defense or due to prior obligations France had to Poland and the Czechs. A French promise to provide military assistance to the Soviet Union in the event of a German-Soviet conflict therefore constitutes a breach of the Locarno Pact. And in Locarno—and this is significant—Germany pledged the aforementioned demilitarization of the German Rhineland, which Hitler now reneges on.

The signing of the Franco-Soviet Treaty on May 2, 1935, was preceded by months of diplomatic wrangling between Paris and Berlin, in which the guarantor powers of the Locarno Pact also indirectly played a part. In April 1935, British Foreign Secretary Simon warned the French government *"that England would be alarmed if France were to sign a treaty which might draw it into a war with Germany, and*

under conditions incompatible with Article 2 of the Locarno Pact." On May 25, 1935, the German government sent a memorandum to the French government asserting that the new Franco-Soviet treaty contradicted Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations and that, in Germany's

¹¹

view, it violated the Locarno Pact.¹² The French government replied that the new treaty did not establish a Franco-Soviet military alliance and was otherwise entirely in accordance with the League of Nations treaty and the Locarno Pact. For its own assurance, France also consulted the guarantor powers of Locarno—Great Britain, Italy, and Belgium—and obtained confirmation that they considered the Locarno Pact to remain valid even after the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact.

In January 1936, the German government made another attempt to avert the Franco-Soviet treaty by other means. It offered Paris a Franco-German non-aggression pact. France rejected the proposal. With this, Berlin lost another round of foreign policy to Paris.

On February 27, 1936, the Soviet-French Mutual Assistance Pact was ratified by the French National Assembly.

For Hitler, the Franco-Soviet Treaty was a setback in his efforts to secure Germany's external security. His success of 1934, the non-aggression pact with Poland, had broken France's encirclement of Germany. With its newly concluded alliance with the Soviets, Paris was closing the gap.

¹¹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 282

¹² ADAP, Series C, Volume IV 1, Annex to Document 107

Lücke with a new ally. This turn of events has two aspects for Germany's security. First, it becomes clear that Paris does not place unconditional faith in the German guarantees in the Locarno Treaties and that it is quite possible that another war is being considered. Second, the alliance of Germany's potential adversaries on France's side is strengthened by another million soldiers. For Germany, this is not a good prospect, given the Franco-Russian cooperation of 1914.

A sober assessment reveals that in 1935 France further expanded its alliance system at Germany's expense, that the French armed forces were still far superior to the fledgling German Wehrmacht, and that Germany's border with France lay unprotected. Hitler and the Reichswehr leadership were fully aware that leaving the Rhine border exposed to German troops not only served France's security but also provided the French with a gateway into the now unprotected German Reich. The threat of French invasion during the Upper Silesian fighting of 1921, and the actual invasions by the Belgians and French on March 8, 1921, and March 11, 1921, respectively, underscore this point.

January 1923 are not forgotten.

Furthermore, the new Soviet-French Pact – contrary to the portrayal by the French government – is more than just a purely political treaty.

On February 13 and 14, 1936, Soviet Marshal Tukhachevsky visited his French counterpart, Commander-in-Chief General Gamelin, in Paris.¹³ German intelligence was able to ascertain that the French General Staff was developing a plan for potential cooperation between the French and Soviet armed forces. This plan envisioned a French invasion through the Rhineland, which had been stripped of German troops, troop movements across the Middle Rhine, and then along the Main River towards Czechoslovakia, where a union with the Soviet allies was planned.¹⁴

The French violation of the Locarno Treaty by concluding the mutual assistance agreement with the Soviet Union gave Hitler reason to no longer adhere to this pact either, justifying one with the other.

Hitler makes the political decision to reoccupy the Rhineland, which is not protected by German troops.

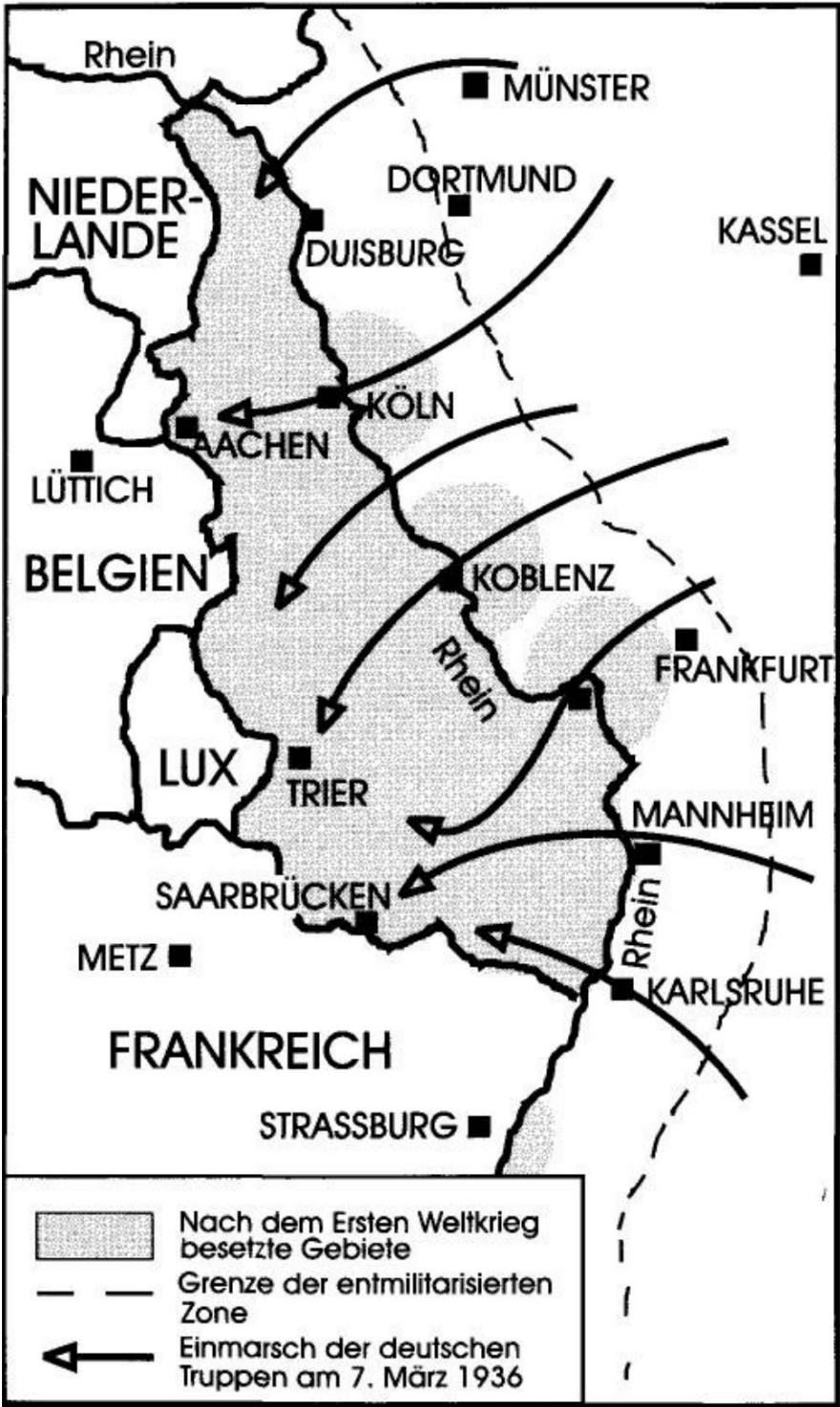
In early March 1936, the dictator Hitler announced his decision to the top brass of the Foreign Office and the Wehrmacht. He was strongly advised against it by both sides. The German embassy in Paris predicted that the French government would not tolerate the German move and would respond militarily.

General von Blomberg, as Reich Minister of War, argues that the military-

¹³ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 283

¹⁴ IMT. Proceedings, Volume XVI, page 686

Germany, which is only just beginning its reconstruction, is vastly inferior to the French armed forces in strength, weaponry, and reserves. Against all advice, Hitler predicts that France will not respond militarily to a German invasion of the Rhineland, despite all the aforementioned reasons.



Map 5: The Wehrmacht's invasion of the Rhineland

On March 7, 1936, Hitler sent 19 Wehrmacht battalions into the demilitarized

15. To avoid adding a military threat to the political provocation, initially only three of the 19 battalions crossed the Rhine to the west and entered Saarbrücken, Trier, and Aachen . 16. With this action, Hitler violated the Treaties of Locarno and Versailles. However, he also created the conditions for the German Reich's ability to defend itself to the west. Hitler accompanied this step with a new offer to France. He proposed—if France agreed—establishing a demilitarized zone on both sides of the Franco-German border, limiting the combined maximum numbers of German and French armed forces, and concluding a 25-year non-aggression pact.

The reactions of France and the other former victorious powers vindicated Hitler. The French government did declare a state of alert for the army, occupy the Maginot Line, and move North African divisions from southern France to the German border. Otherwise, it merely attempted to turn the Locarno guarantee powers and the League of Nations against Germany. However, apart from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, no one offered the French any assistance. Despite French pleas, the British government refused to mobilize. London did not want to jeopardize the naval treaty with Germany, concluded only nine months earlier, nor risk a new war to enforce a provision of the Treaty of Versailles that was favorable to France. London offered only its mediation services. The other Locarno guarantee powers, Belgium and Italy, aligned themselves with Britain's position.

On March 14, 1936, the League of Nations Council convened to decide on Germany's violation of the Treaty of Versailles. The French representative demanded that Germany be charged and condemned for the breach. The British representative declared on behalf of "His Majesty's Government": *"It is obvious that the invasion of the Rhineland by*

German troops constitutes a violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Nevertheless, this action does not pose a threat to peace and does not require the immediate counterattack provided for in certain cases in the Locarno Pact. Undoubtedly, the reoccupation of the Rhineland weakens France's power, but it in no way weakens its security."

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After seven days of deliberations, the League of Nations declared that Germany had violated Article 43 of the Treaty of Versailles. However, it demanded neither...

¹⁵ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 294;

¹⁶ MGFA German Reich and World War II, Volume 1, page

¹⁷ 425; Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 300

the withdrawal of the German troops who had invaded the Rhineland, and no sanctions.

The consequences of Hitler's coup, however, are momentous in a different way. Adolf Hitler's move in the Rhineland, against all advice from diplomats and generals, proved correct. This undermined his confidence in the judgment of his appointed advisors and boosted his own self-confidence, which later became excessive after further successes. He also began to underestimate the decisiveness of foreign governments. The effect on the German generals was precisely the opposite. Their confidence in their own judgment became fragile, and they began to give Hitler too much credit in matters of foreign and security policy.

The annexation of Austria

A better heading would certainly have been "Reunification" with Austria, but this process has gone down in history under the term "Anschluss" (annexation). The futile attempts by the parliaments and governments of the German Reich and the Republic of Austria in 1919 to reunite the two countries into one state after almost a millennium of shared history and 54 years of separation have left fewer traces in historical accounts than the Anschluss, successfully carried out by both countries in 1938.

The backstory

The unified statehood of the German lands, including those that would later form the state of Austria, began in 911 with the election of Conrad I as King of East Francia, which soon became known as the "Reich der Deutschen" (Kingdom of the Germans) and later as the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation." In 1273, the crown of this Holy Roman Empire passed for the first time to a prince from the House of Habsburg, Rudolf I, Duke of Austria, Duke of Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola, and Count of Tyrol. After him, princes from the Houses of Nassau, Bavaria, and Luxembourg wore the crown of German king and emperor before this dignity returned to a prince from the House of Habsburg in 1438, where it remained in unbroken succession until 1806. Thus, for almost a millennium, the territories of the House of Habsburg were an integral part of the German Empire, and the Habsburg princes were simultaneously the kings and emperors of Germany for the last 368 years.

In 1806, following the French attacks on the German Empire and the formation of a "Confederation of the Rhine" of German principalities under French suzerainty, Emperor Francis II of the House of Habsburg dissolved the first German Confederation by decree.

The German Empire was dissolved. At the same time, the now-abdicated Emperor Francis II united his inherited lands of Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Tyrol, Styria, Carniola, Carinthia, and others into an Austrian Empire, over which he henceforth ruled as Francis I. However, the independent path of the House of Habsburg, alongside its affiliation with Germany, had already begun a few centuries earlier. Through marriages, inheritances, purchases, and treaties, many countries outside the German Empire came under Habsburg rule, either permanently or for a limited time. These included Hungary, Croatia, Galicia, Bukovina, the Banat, Tuscany, the Duchy of Milan, part of Serbia, and finally, in 1908, Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Map 6: Habsburg lands before 1914

In 1815, after the collapse of Napoleonic rule and the dissolution of the French kingdoms in Europe, 36 German princes and four free imperial cities founded the German Confederation in place of the defunct Holy Roman Empire. And once again, it was the head of the House of Habsburg, the Emperor of Austria, who presided over the German Confederation.

Just over three decades later, another attempt was made to unite Germany into a stable state. In 1849, the Constituent National Assembly in St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt proclaimed a "united and indivisible Reich," but opinions diverged on what should belong to the Reich. The National Assembly called upon the Austrian government to join the new German Reich with its German territories and, at the same time, to renounce its sovereign rights in all non-German territories. The National Assembly-

The coalition aims to establish a Germany without foreign peoples under German rule. Thus, Austria faces a choice: to become the leading power in a new German Reich, relinquishing its non-German principalities, or to remain the leading power in its own empire in the Danube region. Austria does not want to commit to becoming an exclusively German state. Therefore, for the time being, the German Confederation of 1815 remains in place, and Austria continues to play its dual role as a member of the German Confederation and as a multi-ethnic state in the Danube region.

The following 17 years saw a shift in the political balance of power within the German Confederation. Prussia began to unite the German states through diplomacy and warfare. Meanwhile, Habsburg power and influence diminished, partly due to the defeat in the war with France in 1859. In 1866, a dispute over the administration of Schleswig-Holstein led to the Austro-Prussian War, in which the Emperor of Austria, as chairman of the German Confederation, represented imperial authority for the last time. He called the German Confederation army to arms against the Prussians. In this war, the Emperor once again led the majority of all the German states: the kingdoms of Hanover, Saxony, Württemberg, and Bavaria, along with several other smaller principalities. Only the Principality of Lippe and the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha sided with Prussia, but at the Battle of Königgrätz in Bohemia, the Austrian army was decisively defeated by the Prussian forces. This marked the end of Habsburg dominance in the German Empire. The goal of Prussian policy in this war was to expel Austria from the German Confederation in order to unite the remaining German states into a new German Reich without the multi-ethnic state of Vienna. Thus, after the victory at Königgrätz, Prussia refrained from dismantling Habsburg Austria, but dissolved the German Confederation and expelled the German-Austrians and their 16 non-German constituent peoples from Germany. This severed the bond between German-German and Austrian-German relations.

Austria and the other German states were separated after 955 years of union.

Over the next 48 years, the other German states united under Prussian leadership to form the Second German Empire and developed a new German-Prussian identity. The Second German Empire and the Austrian Empire then went their separate ways for less than half a century before reuniting as allies in the First World War. These 48 years of separation profoundly influenced the historical consciousness and self-awareness of Imperial Germany. The Habsburg roots of the nation faded into obscurity in Prussian Germany. In this respect, this period of German division bears a resemblance to the division of Germany after the Second World War. The actual political circumstances shaped consciousness and overshadowed the feeling of belonging together.

And just as in 1990 with the collapse of the GDR, so in 1918 it was the defeat of both.

German empires, which reunite the Germans. The Habsburg Empire is shattered. 41 million former Habsburg subjects whose mother tongue is not German found their own states or are forcibly absorbed into other states. And 7 million German-Austrians remain in the new Republic of Austria with the territorial remnant left over from the Habsburg Empire by the victorious powers at the Conference of Saint-Germain.



Map 7: Austria after 1919

The German-Austrian rapprochement

The 54 years of German-German separation since 1866 have not extinguished the feeling of belonging to the same people in Germany and Austria, just as the 45 years of German division did not extinguish it for Germans in West and Central Germany after 1945.

In 1919, social democratic governments assumed control of the newly formed republics of Germany and Austria. In Austria, the parliamentarians tasked with drafting a new constitution unanimously passed the following resolution at their first working session on November 12, 1918:

"German-Austria is a democratic republic. All public powers are appointed by the people. German-Austria is a part of the German Republic." Just over a week later, on November 21, the Austrian National Assembly¹⁸ also claimed to represent all Germans from the

old Habsburg lands:

*"The German-Austrian state claims territorial sovereignty over the entire German settlement area, especially also in the Sudetenland."*¹⁹

In the new German Reich, politicians shared the same desires. On February 6, 1919, MP Scheidemann (SPD) concluded his opening address to the constituent session of the Weimar National Assembly with an appeal to "our brothers in Bohemia and Austria." He ended his speech with the words: *"May the time be near when our Austrian brothers will once again take their place in the great German national community."* On March 2, 1919, the first post-war National Assembly convened in Vienna for its opening session. Almost unanimously—with the exception of a handful of monarchists—the MPs from all represented parties resolved to recognize Austria as part of Germany. This made the resolution of the Constituent Assembly of November 12, 1918, which declared German-Austria to be part of the German Republic, law. On the same day, March 2, the Austrian MP Otto Bauer and the German Foreign Minister Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau signed a treaty.

A state treaty was signed for the annexation of Austria to the new German Republic. However, the victorious powers immediately put a stop to this kind of self-determination. When the Austrian peace delegation arrived in Saint-Germain, they were immediately informed that the Republic of Austria was forbidden from joining Germany and that defeated Austria was not allowed to call itself "German-Austria." The head of the delegation from Vienna, Chancellor Dr. Renner, protested, referring to Wilson's Fourteen Points and invoking the right to self-determination proclaimed by the victors themselves.

He receives the reply that this right does not apply to the defeated in any way.
That's how the victorious powers would have decided.

The Austrian delegation could not and was not permitted to negotiate the Treaty of Saint-Germain, just as the Germans could not negotiate the Treaty of Versailles. Only the exchange of notes was allowed. The five victorious powers—the USA, France, Great Britain, Japan, and Italy—who were delivering their verdict on Austria in Saint-Germain, stipulated in Article 88 of their peace terms that Austria must remain permanently independent. Even while the victors were still meeting in Saint-Germain, the Austrian government attempted to appease them and the

¹⁸ IMT. Proceedings, Volume XV, page
¹⁹ 666

The League of Nations aimed to demonstrate the strength of the population's desire to join the German Reich.²⁰ It scheduled three regional plebiscites in Tyrol, the province of Salzburg, and Upper Austria. The Tyrolean plebiscite yielded 143,302 votes in favor of annexation and 1,805 against.²¹ This represented a 98.7% vote in favor of Austria's union with Germany. The victors prevented the plebiscites in Upper Austria and Salzburg. Nevertheless, a citizens' initiative succeeded in holding a plebiscite in Salzburg, albeit not until 1921. The result, with 98,546 votes in favor and 877 against, i.e., 99.1% in favor of annexation, left no room for doubt.

Four days before the Austrian delegation in Saint-Germain had to sign the victor's verdict, on September 6, 1919, Chancellor Dr. Renner once again declared in the Vienna National Assembly:
"German-Austria will never relinquish the goal of its peaceful policy of reunification with the German Reich."

This is a final act of defiance. The naked power of hunger has forced Austria, just like Germany, to give in. From the armistice until July 1919, England cut off food supplies to Germany.

and Austria through a naval blockade, in order to force the defeated powers in Versailles and Saint-Germain to sign. In both countries, almost a million people have now died of starvation, especially many children. Austria and Germany can no longer risk a resumption of the blockade by refusing to sign, as Great Britain has threatened to do so.

On September 10, the Austrian government was forced to accept and sign the Treaty of Saint-Germain. On October 21, under pressure from the victors, it was forced to remove the sentence from the constitution stating "German-Austria is a constituent part of the German Republic." On July 18, 1920, the parliament in Vienna ratified the Treaty of Saint-Germain, and Austria, against the will of the vast majority of its citizens, once again stood on Germany's doorstep. Despite this, all Austrian political parties—except for the legalists (monarchists) and communists—included the eventual annexation of their country as a goal in their party platforms. This applied to the Social Democrats, the German Nationalists, the National Liberal Farmers' Party, and the Christian Socialists, who, having become the party of the dictatorship in 1934, opposed annexation to the Reich.

In the German Reich, people thought and acted no differently on the Anschluss question than in Tyrol, Salzburg, or Vienna. Already in Weimar, at the first session of the

²⁰ Bernhardt, page 45

²¹ IMT Proceedings, Volume XV, page 667

At the German National Assembly on February 6, 1919, the future Reich President Friedrich Ebert declared on this issue: *"German-Austria must be united with the motherland for all time. ... Our comrades and fellow countrymen can be assured that we will welcome them with open arms and hearts in the new Reich of the German nation. They belong to us and we belong to them."*

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However, the Treaty of Versailles also stipulates that the right of self-determination of the Germans in the two defeated states may not be exercised in this matter. Article 80 of the treaty, signed on June 28, 1919, states:

"Germany recognizes the independence of Austria and will strictly regard it as unalterable within the borders established by the present treaty, except with the consent of the Council of the League of Nations."

The German Reichstag saw the addendum "unless with the consent of the Council of the League of Nations" as an open door for future developments. With this vague prospect, the members of the German Reichstag added Article 61 to the Weimar Constitution on August 11, 1919, which reads: *"After its annexation to the German Reich, German-Austria shall have the right to participate in the Reichsrat with the number of votes corresponding to its population. Until then, the representatives of German-Austria shall have an advisory vote."*

Thus, Article 61 of the Weimar Constitution speaks of the coming annexation of Austria, just as the Basic Law of Bonn, 30 years later, speaks of the "accession of the other parts of Germany" in Article 23. Only five weeks later, on September 22, 1919, the German Reichstag, under pressure from the victorious powers, had to amend the Weimar Constitution again and delete Article 61.

The German-Austrian Unification Treaty of November 1918, concluded by Bauer and Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, was relegated to the archives as a dead document, never having been ratified by the parliaments in Berlin and Vienna. However, the feeling of belonging to the people of Austria persisted among the citizens and political parties of the German Reich. As late as 1932, the Reichstag deputy and later Federal President Theodor Heuss described the "Greater German idea" of unity with Austria as one of the few ideas that the parties of the Weimar Republic shared.²³

From the victors' perspective, the prohibition of German-Austrian unification initially made perfect sense. With an annexed Austria, defeated Germany could have compensated for its losses in territory and people.

²² Bernhardt, page 31

²³ Heuss, page LX

But this calculation by the victors disregards their own established principle of the right of peoples to self-determination. Furthermore, an independent Austria is intended to help keep German economic influence out of the Danube and Balkan regions.

Post-war Austria

The 1920s were a poor and bitter time for Austria. The Habsburg economic network was shattered. Sudeten German industry in Czechoslovakia and the agricultural regions of Hungary were cut off from Austria.

Conversely, Austrian industry lacks its old sales market in the Danube region. Large numbers of German-speaking civil servants and soldiers are streaming back to Austria from the non-German Habsburg principalities, without finding wages or work there. The cost of living is rising, food is becoming scarce, the number of unemployed climbs to 800,000, all unsuccessfully seeking employment, and Austria's foreign debt will soon be insurmountable. The Social Democratic government under Dr.

Renner was unable to solve the country's economic and social problems and in 1920 had to give way to a coalition government of church-affiliated, so-called clerical forces and liberals under Monsignor Dr. Seipel.

Even Dr. Seipel and his successors could not overcome the young republic's economic problems. A banking crisis in 1928, large foreign trade deficits, and persistently high foreign debt forced the Austrian government to seek new solutions. It pursued the formation of a customs union with Germany. In 1931, the foreign ministers from Berlin and Vienna attempted to establish a German-Austrian economic and customs union, likely with the shared hope that this would lay the foundation for national unification. The hope for eventual unification with Germany remained unbroken in Austria, and all political parties—except monarchists (legalists) and Marxists—agreed upon this and repeatedly expressed it. For example, the leader of the Social Democrats, Dr. Renner, recalled this in a public speech on November 12, 1928.

to the decision of the founding fathers to unite Austria and Germany, and declares: *"Today, ten years after*

*November 10, 1918, and forevermore, we faithfully adhere to this decision and reaffirm it with our signature. ... The Treaty of Saint-Germain destroyed the right of self-determination of the Germans in Austria. ... Let Austria's citizens vote freely and they will decide on reunification with Germany by 99 out of 100 votes."*²⁴

²⁴ Kern, page 77

The stance of the ruling Christian Social Party did not deviate from this. In 1931, they reiterated in a party resolution their goal of annexing Austria to Germany. Such speeches and resolutions did not escape the notice of the victorious powers of the World War II era, and their reaction to the customs union is thus understandable.

On March 24, 1931, the German-Austrian economic and customs union was sealed with the "Vienna Protocol." Protests poured in from Paris, London, Prague, and Rome. The governments of England and France brought the Vienna Protocol before the League of Nations in Geneva, arguing that it violated Article 88 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, the independence clause. The case was ultimately decided by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which ruled the customs union illegal. France felt compelled to punish Austria further, withdrawing loans from the already weakened country. This led to the collapse of the Austrian Credit Institute in May 1931 and, shortly thereafter, the Darmstadt National Bank. Austria's economic difficulties were thus exacerbated, and another attempt by the two countries to move closer to eventual unification failed.

The following years in Austria were politically just as turbulent as those in the German Reich. On May 21, 1932, the Christian Social politician Engelbert Dollfuss took over the Austrian government. He, too, was unable to stem unemployment, financial woes, and economic decline. In the summer of 1932, Dollfuss therefore negotiated with the League of Nations for another government loan. But

He attached to this the condition that Austria, in return, refrain from any attempt to form a customs union with Germany for the next ten years. During the parliamentary debates on this League of Nations condition, there were heated clashes in August and October 1932, in which the National Council²⁶ ultimately forced new parliamentary elections for the spring of 1933.

Another parliamentary crisis in March 1933, initially concerning only a railway workers' strike, led to the National Council dismissing Chancellor Dollfuss on March 15, 1933, through a decision that had not been properly reached. He, in turn, had the parliament building occupied by the police and the National Council never convened again. Thus, since 1933, Austria has been ruled not by a parliament, but by a dictator.

In May 1933, Dollfuss first prohibited the National Council elections scheduled for that month, then banned the Communist Party, and in June, the National Socialist Party in Austria. In September, so-called "detention camps" were established for the imprisonment of political opponents. These were similar to the concentration camps that were also established in Germany that same year. In mid-February 1934, a police operation followed to eliminate the combat unit of the

²⁵ Documents British Foreign Policy, Second Series, Volume II, Documents 1 to 29

²⁶ First Chamber of Parliament, equivalent to the Bundestag

to disarm the Social Democratic Party, the "Schutzbund" (Republican Defense League). This led first to resistance and street battles in Linz and Vienna. Then the Social Democratic Party was banned and the Free Trade Unions dissolved. Thus, Dollfuss disempowered all parties and organizations of the Austrian labor movement without being able to improve the lot of workers in the slightest. Meanwhile, in the nearby German Reich, the economy began to recover slowly but noticeably. The hardship of the German workforce lessened. The number of unemployed fell. And this economic-

The economic miracle was ironically the political success of a party banned in Austria, the National Socialists. With the German economic boom, not only did the idea of annexation to the German Reich gain renewed popularity in Austria, but so did the National Socialist movement. It was well known that this movement was working towards the annexation of Austria to the German Reich.

In May 1933, Chancellor Dollfuss founded the so-called Fatherland Front as a replacement for the political parties and their affiliated organizations, and subsequently based the government and administration of his country on this front. The majority of the parties not belonging to the Fatherland Front formed a loose alliance called the "National Opposition." The majority of them advocated for the annexation of Austria by the German Reich.

Chancellor Dollfuss, himself a proponent of Austro-German unity in his youth, put an end to the existing consensus among Austrian parties regarding annexation to the German Reich. Dollfuss, who as a dictator already had no desire to risk his power and rule with new elections in his own country, certainly did not want to lose either through an annexation of Austria to the German Reich. Thus, Austria's policy of annexation ended with Dollfuss and the end of democracy in postwar Austria. A tragic event then occurred, which went down in history as the "Dollfuss assassination," although it was a manslaughter unintended by the perpetrators. The Austrian National Socialists saw that the path to power in Germany for their German sister party had been possible through free elections. In Austria, Chancellor Dollfuss blocked this possibility by refusing to allow new National Council elections. A direct coup to power had virtually no chance of success, since Hitler, who could theoretically have helped, made it clear that he did not yet consider the time ripe for the annexation of Austria, and because the signaling powers of Saint-Germain would never tolerate a Nazi putsch in Austria. Furthermore, in 1934, with its Wehrmacht still incomplete and the Rhineland border still open to France, Germany would not have had the slightest chance of successfully supporting Austria's National Socialists in such a conflict.

Thus, the leadership of the National Socialists in Austria developed a two-stage plan to seize power without German assistance. The first step was to capture Dollfuss and put him on trial as dictator. He would then be replaced by...

Rintelen, the former Christian Social Interior Minister ousted by Dollfuss, is to become Chancellor. Under Rintelen, a democrat without dictatorial ambitions, there will – so the thinking goes – be free elections again. And with these elections, the leadership of the Austrian National Socialists hopes for victory and a legal takeover of the government. Rintelen offers himself as the new Chancellor should this coup succeed.

On July 25, 1934, Chancellor Dollfuss was to be arrested during a cabinet meeting. However, the operation was betrayed at the last moment.

Dollfuss fled in a group through the corridors of his Chancellery in the Vienna Ballhaus. The putschists and Dollfuss's group suddenly encountered each other in a hall bathed in blindingly bright light. Dollfuss's companions raised their hands in surrender, and Dollfuss, alone among them, rushed forward toward the foremost putschist. The latter, unable to recognize the Chancellor in the glare, felt threatened himself, lost his nerve, and fired two shots instead of arresting the wanted man. Thus, Chancellor Dollfuss died from the bullets fired at him by an Austrian National Socialist.²⁷

The population reacted with disgust to the crime against their Chancellor. Dictator Dollfuss, rejected by all Austrian democrats until then, became a national martyr overnight, and the National Socialists faced justified outrage from the people throughout Austria. Rintelen, a co-conspirator, was sentenced to 25 years in prison. The gunman and 12 other putschists were sentenced to death and soon executed. Standing beneath his gallows, the gunman reiterated that he had never intended to kill Chancellor Dollfuss. He had only fired because he felt threatened.

The death of Chancellor Dollfuss saddled the Austrian National Socialists with the stigma of crime and putsch. Their reputation plummeted, and with it, the appeal of their proposed annexation to the German Reich. To make matters worse, Germany became entangled in the affair after the shooting of the dictator Dollfuss. When the attempt to arrest Dollfuss failed so tragically, the putschists were surrounded by police and military in the Ballhaus. They demanded safe passage across the border into Bavaria and threatened to entrench themselves with their weapons if they refused. Initially, safe passage was guaranteed. The putschists, distrustful of this promise, called the German ambassador in Vienna to the Ballhaus to guarantee and oversee their departure. The ambassador spontaneously agreed to intervene to prevent further bloodshed. Although he was ultimately unable to do so, the putschists' desire to flee to Germany and the German ambassador's actions had already set the stage for a potentially devastating outcome.

²⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 5, page 151

The German Reich was implicated in this coup for everyone in Austria and for the whole world. The false impression arose that the strings for the affair and for the death of the Chancellor had been pulled by German authorities. This dampened the desire, previously widespread in Austria, for annexation by the German Reich.

The Dollfuss era was followed by the Schuschnigg era. After Dollfuss's death, Austrian-German relations were frozen for a period of two years. Even under Chancellor Schuschnigg, there were no free elections.

The absolute rule of the "Fatherland Front," which emerged from the Christian Social Party, is now being oriented towards Christian dictatorship. Schuschnigg is also attempting to prevent the unification of Austria with Germany.
dern.

It was only in the summer of 1936, under gentle pressure from Italy, that an attempt at rapprochement between the two German-speaking states took place. On July 11, 1936, Chancellor von Schuschnigg and the German Special Envoy to Austria, von Papen, signed a German-Austrian Agreement on the normalization and friendly relations between the two states. In it, Germany recognized the "full sovereignty of the Federal State of Austria," and Austria explicitly affirmed its status as a German state. In an addendum to the agreement, Schuschnigg pledged in writing to involve "representatives of the former so-called National Opposition in Austria" in the political process.

Hitler commented on the agreement to the leader of the Austrian National Socialists, Josef Leopold, with the words:

*"I take this new agreement very seriously. The Austrian National Socialists must maintain exemplary discipline and regard the Anschluss as an internal Austrian matter, and try to make progress in Austria along this path."*²⁸ Hitler considers the later Anschluss of Austria an inevitable consequence of the will of the majority of the Austrian population,

which had been expressed so often in the past. In Hitler's view, the sovereignty of the Federal State of Austria, recognized by Germany, does not stand in the way. Hitler is certain that the Anschluss of Austria will one day be the free and sovereign decision of an Austrian government. But he is to be mistaken. Regrettably, the agreement of July 11 cannot bridge the German-Austrian differences.

Chancellor Schuschnigg wanted to preserve a sovereign Austria rooted in Habsburg tradition, a second, "better" German state. When the Austrian government showed no sign of fulfilling its promise from July 1936 and forces from the National Opposition were excluded from political responsibility,

²⁸ v. Papen, page 424

The involvement of the *tung* (a local term for the *tung*) will again strain relations between Berlin and Vienna.

In the following period, pro- and anti-German demonstrations of popular will alternated in Austria. In April 1937, at German urging, Schuschnigg appointed a mediator between the government and the forces of the so-called National Opposition, in order to involve them, as promised, in political responsibility. The mediator was the young and non-partisan lawyer Dr. Seyß-Inquart, who enjoyed the trust of both his Federal Chancellor Schuschnigg and soon that of Adolf Hitler. Seyß-Inquart made no secret of his desire for the annexation of Austria by the German Reich.

Despite the German-Austrian agreement of July 1936 and Seyß-Inquart's mediation efforts, the pressure of the dictatorship in Austria did not abate. Documentation by a Viennese lawyer from June 1937 testifies to how courts, party authorities, the gendarmerie, and the police treated those who, in accordance with the first Austrian constitution of 1918, still professed their commitment to unity with the German Reich in 1936 and 1937. The document, "Justitia fundamentum regnorum," which was forwarded to Chancellor Schuschnigg, comprises 264 examples of legal violations and persecution against members of the "National Opposition." This list of transgressions is considerable. It includes: • Imprisonment without trial, • Detention in concentration camps without trial or verdict, • Pre-trial detention without a judicial order, • Coercive detention for relatives of the accused, • Imprisonment and fines without proof of guilt, • Imprisonment without the existence of a criminal offense, • Double jeopardy in two separate proceedings for one and the same offense

Crime,

- Additional economic penalties such as confiscation of assets, • revocation of driver's license or the imposition of food and accommodation costs in the case of imprisonment in concentration camps,
- Reversal of the burden of proof in criminal proceedings, • Coercion to obtain confessions,
- Physical abuse of prisoners, • Failure to provide medical treatment to sick or injured political prisoners
severe prisoner, some with fatal consequences,
- Revocation of Austrian citizenship after unauthorized
Travel to Germany,

²⁹ Seyß-Inquart only joined the National Socialist Party of Austria in 1938.
³⁰ Guide documentation

- Revocation of trade and business licenses as well as admissions to academic professions from persons with "lack of civic reliability" and
- Dismissal of public service employees on suspicion of nationalist sentiment without pensions or unemployment benefits.

The reasons for these punishments are always similar. They are memberships in banned parties, mostly the Austrian National Socialists, or in one of the many German-minded singing and sports clubs, or even just the defendant's desire for a German-Austrian union, and sometimes only a suspicion in that direction.

Between 1935 and 1937, France, England, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia showed increasingly less sympathy for "authoritarian" Austria. Italy, too, turned away from Austria and toward Germany. Moreover, an economic boom like the one in Germany failed to materialize. During the same period, the Saarland joined the German Reich with 90.8% of the vote in favor of Germany, and the previously open Rhineland border was once again under the protection of German troops. Such successes were not seen in Austria, and a new path to Habsburg glory and greatness remained closed to the small country.

Furthermore, the dictatorship in Austria hardly differed from that in Germany, so the latter was no reason to reject annexation. Thus, the annexation of Austria to the German Reich once again became an attractive prospect for Austrian citizens. Many people, especially those in the working class—even if they were not close to the National Socialists—saw annexation as an economic opportunity. Chancellor Schuschnigg, sensing his country's isolation abroad and aware of the desire for annexation among large segments of the population, asked the envoy von Papen to arrange a state visit with Hitler. The visit took place on February 12, 1938. Schuschnigg was certainly prepared to make certain concessions to German demands during this trip. However, he had not anticipated the demands that Hitler presented to him in Berchtesgaden on that February 12.

Hitler's ideal scenario was undoubtedly that a freely elected National Council and an Austrian government, by virtue of the right of self-determination of peoples, would themselves announce the annexation of Austria to the German Reich—an annexation that the founding fathers of the Austrian constitution and the National Council had already firmly decided upon two decades earlier. However, Hitler now understood that with the dictatorship of the Christian Social politician Schuschnigg, without parliament and without elections, no legal path to annexation remained open.

According to Schuschnigg's account – and this is the only one that has been passed down to us – the conversation between the two dictators, Schuschnigg and Hitler, was nothing but a row. Hitler criticizes Schuschnigg for many things, including the actions of the police in Austria against the National Socialist Party, border fortifications against Germany, and other issues.

more. When Schuschnigg defends Austria's independence and insists that he is the one representing Austria here, Hitler doubts his legitimacy and says:

"I could call myself an Austrian with the same, and even more, justification than you, Mr. Schuschnigg. Why don't you try it and hold a free referendum in Austria in which you and I run against each other, then you'll see!" Hitler was referring to the fact that three years earlier Schuschnigg had not – like himself –
31

He came to office not through elections, but as a replacement for the deceased Dollfuss.

Hitler presents Schuschnigg with a "list of German proposals for a final settlement of the Austrian question." The main demands are: • Obligation for both governments to consult on foreign policy issues,

• Appointment of State Councillor Dr. Seyß-Inquart as Minister of the Interior and subordinate to...

lung of the security system among these,

• Freedom of political activity for the Austrian National Socialist Party to operate legally within the framework of the "Fatherland Front", • Amnesty for all Austrians imprisoned for National Socialist political activity, • Restoration of freedom of the press, • Cooperation between the armed forces of Austria and

Germany, • Preparation for the harmonization of the economic systems of both countries under the leadership of a certain Dr.

Fischböck as Finance Minister, and • Assurance from the German Reich government that Reich German party offices would not interfere in internal Austrian affairs.

The "proposals" end with an ultimatum: "The Federal Chancellor declares himself ready to implement the agreed measures by February 18, 1938,"³² that is, in just one week. Chancellor Schuschnigg, however, argues that some of the demands of the constitution can only be met by the Austrian Federal President, and he manages to negotiate and change a few details with Hitler. For example, Dr. Fischböck will not become Finance Minister. But after Hitler makes it clear to him that he—Schuschnigg—must sign or Hitler could act differently, Schuschnigg puts his name to the document.

Returning to Vienna, the Austrian Chancellor had to implement the German demands, reshuffle his cabinet, grant amnesty to convicts, and persuade the Federal President to do all of this. The National Socialists, now freed from the ban and no longer persecuted by the police, mobilized

³¹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 5, page 200

³² ADAP, Volume I, Documents 294/295, pages 421-424

Now, in Graz, Salzburg, Klagenfurt, and Linz, the masses are demonstrating and openly showing their support for an annexation. Minister Seyss-Inquart is traveling through the provinces to urge the National Socialist leaders in the federal states to exercise restraint, but the movement is unstoppable. The pressure from the streets is mounting, and Hitler subsequently insists once again on the demand that Dr. to appoint Fischböck as Austria's finance minister.

Dr. Schuschnigg's "referendum"

Now Chancellor Schuschnigg is taking the offensive. He believes that the majority of Austrian citizens are in favor of the country's independence and against annexation. He also apparently harbors illusions about his own popularity. On Wednesday, March 9th, Schuschnigg unexpectedly schedules a referendum on the annexation question for the following Sunday, just four days later. The short notice and several other factors indicate that the Chancellor is acting in a panic. For example, he failed to consult all ministers about the referendum plan, which would have been required under Article 65 of the Constitution. Since there had been no elections at the federal level since 1929 and at the state level since 1932, and because elections had been generally prohibited by Dollfuss in 1933, there are no longer any current electoral lists in all of Austria. Furthermore, the Chancellor, who has become disillusioned with democracy, has ordered that election supervision and vote counting are to be carried out solely by the "Fatherland Front," i.e., the government camp. Chancellor Schuschnigg has also lowered the voting age to 25. He fears that young voters in particular will be inclined to support annexation by the German Reich. Finally, Dr. Schuschnigg has decreed that only ballot papers marked "YES" will be issued at polling stations, signifying a "yes" vote for independence. Anyone voting for the annexation of Austria by the German Reich must produce their own ballot paper of a prescribed size, marked "NO," and bring it to the polling station. Section 22 of the decree concerning this referendum stipulates the following:

"A ballot paper... is valid if it is printed or written with 'Yes' on one side, even if the word is crossed out or has an addendum. Partially torn ballot papers with the printed or written word 'Yes' are also considered 'Yes' votes."

Those who wish to vote "No" must write the word "No" by hand on a slip of paper of the same size, as described above. Slips of paper containing the word "No" with any addition are invalid. Completely blank ballots are considered Yes votes. ...³³

Otherwise, Chancellor Schuschnigg is hastily negotiating with the leaders of the previously banned parties and the dissolved trade unions to get them to participate in the elections.

³³ Official Gazette for Upper Austria of March 10, 1938

Calls against annexation were to be won. As a price, the leaders, so suddenly addressed, demanded that their parties be immediately re-legalized, and they demanded that their party members, thousands of whom were imprisoned in "detention camps," finally be released. But Dr. Schuschnigg's rigged referendum did not go unchallenged.

Interior Minister Seyß-Inquart and another member of the government, Minister Glaise-Horstenau, immediately informed their Chancellor that scheduling this election without prior consultation of the Cabinet was unconstitutional, and that it was unacceptable for the ruling Fatherland Front alone to oversee the elections and then ultimately count the votes. The two ministers demanded that the referendum be postponed to a later date so that preparations could be made for the elections. Chancellor Schuschnigg rejected Seyß-Inquart's and Glaise-Horstenau's concerns and demands.

The following day, Seyß-Inquart reiterated his objection in a letter to Chancellor Schuschnigg, who replied that the election would still take place next Sunday. There were now only three days until then.

On March 11, after another night of uncertainty, Ministers Seyß-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau made one last attempt to persuade Schuschnigg to change his mind. They pointed out that the hastily scheduled election date and the conditions already in place could lead to violence in the country. Schuschnigg insisted on holding the election on the Sunday in two days. Thereupon, late that morning, the two ministers, on their own behalf and on behalf of other cabinet members, sent an ultimatum to the Chancellor. The six conditions contained in this letter were: 1. A new referendum will be held within four weeks. It will be in accordance with Article 65 of the Federal Constitution.

2. The Minister of the Interior, Dr. Seyß-Inquart, is entrusted with the technical implementation of this referendum.
3. The composition of the election commission should be such that in each
In some cases, a representative of the National Socialists has his seat.
4. The possibility of election propaganda should be granted to all parties, including the National Socialists.
5. In the event of the rejection of the above conditions, the two ministers and the other national officials announce their resignation and reject any responsibility for the subsequent events.
6. These conditions must be accepted today, no later than 1 p.m.
will be."³⁴

When Schuschnigg reads this letter, he has only one hour left to decide. The deadline is unacceptably short, but the Austrian Interior Minister-

³⁴ Benoist-Mechin, Volume 5, page 248

The minister demanded nothing more from his chancellor than that the election be held according to law and justice, with equal opportunities for all political parties. After two hours, Chancellor Schuschnigg informed the minister that while they could discuss the framework of the election, they could not discuss postponing it. The referendum would take place, as previously agreed, on Sunday in two days. Seyß-Inquart then abandoned all further attempts. He contacted Minister Göring in the German Reich Chancellery by telephone directly from the Chancellery in the Ballhaus and asked for his advice.

The reunification: In

Germany, the turmoil in Austria has been followed since March 9th. Hitler was immediately informed of Schuschnigg's rigged elections. It is not difficult to see through the intentions behind the curious election conditions. Election supervision and vote counting by his own people already reek of fraudulent intent, and excluding young voters is a blatant attempt to keep pro-German voters away from the polls.

Hitler sees the chance dwindling that Austria's citizens will be able to decide in free and fair elections at a later date in favor of joining the German Reich, if the opposite has been decided beforehand after a manipulated referendum.

On March 9, Schuschnigg announced his election plan. That same evening, Hitler and Minister Göring conferred about Schuschnigg's move. Hitler was annoyed, but initially had no idea how to react. Göring, who had lived in Austria for a few years and considered Germans and Austrians to be a single nation, was a staunch advocate of the unification of the two constituent nations. He urged Hitler to intervene quickly in Austria.³⁵ Thus, the decision was made to intervene in Austria both politically and militarily. The day after the election announcement, on March 10, Hitler gave the order at 11 a.m. that Wehrmacht divisions should march into Austria on March 12—one day before the planned plebiscite.

Hitler's hastily drafted directive states: *"The Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Berlin, March 11, 1938*

Directive No. 1

1. If other means fail, I intend to enter Austria with armed forces to establish constitutional conditions there and to prevent further acts of violence against the German-minded population.

...

4. The army and air force forces designated for the operation must march in or enter the area no later than 12:00 noon on March 12th.

³⁵ IMT Negotiations, Volume IX, page 333

Be ready to depart. I reserve the right to grant permission to cross and fly over the border and to determine the time for this.

5. *The conduct of the troops must take into account the fact that we do not wish to wage war against a brother nation. It is in our interest that the entire operation proceeds without the use of force, in the form of a peaceful invasion welcomed by the population. Therefore, any provocation must be avoided. Should resistance arise, it is to be broken with the utmost ruthlessness by armed force. Any Austrian units crossing the line will immediately come under German command.*

6. *At the German borders with the other states, the following measures are in place for the time being: to take no safety precautions whatsoever.*

Adolf Hitler" ³⁶

Shortly after 9 p.m. that same evening, the corresponding orders were sent to the troops, who had not been warned until then, leaving them with only 13 hours. On March 11th, the ordered units were already rolling towards Austria. However, whether an invasion would actually occur was not yet decided, because Hitler, in clause 4 of Directive No. 1, reserved the right to halt the troops if, as written in clause 1, "other means lead to the objective."

Minister Göring is now primarily pulling the political strings. Three hours after Hitler signed Directive No. 1, on the 11th...

At approximately 2:30 p.m. in March, Seyß-Inquart made the aforementioned call from Vienna to Göring in Berlin. The Austrian Interior Minister informed Minister Göring that Chancellor Schuschnigg was still unwilling to postpone the plebiscite to a reasonable date. Göring asked Seyß-Inquart to stay on the line for a moment, went to Hitler, and informed him of the news from Vienna. Both realized that this situation eliminated any chance for a fair plebiscite on the Anschluss question. They decided to intervene directly in the Austrian affair and replace Schuschnigg with Seyß-Inquart. Göring hastily jotted down the decision, returned to the telephone, and dictated to Seyß-Inquart, who was waiting on the other end of the line: *"Tell Schuschnigg this verbatim:*

The ultimatum is considered rejected following the response given. Dr. Schuschnigg's resignation must now be demanded. Dr. Seyß-Inquart is to be tasked with forming the new government. The majority of the new cabinet must consist of National Socialists. The plebiscite is cancelled. A new referendum will be held in 14 days, following the same model.

³⁶ IMT Documents, Volume XXXIV, Document 102 C

The Saar vote will take place. You have one hour to respond. If you have not called after the deadline, it will be assumed that you are unable to make a call. In this case, we will take appropriate action. Seyß-Inquart forwards the ultimatum to the Chancellor.³⁷

Schuschnigg now grasps at the last straw he can see. He tries to call the head of the Italian government, Mussolini, for help. The reply, which arrives shortly afterward, states only that the Italian government is refraining from any comment on Austria's current situation. Without a single ally abroad and with dubious support among his own people, Schuschnigg begins to back down, bit by bit. First, he informs the two ministers, Seyß-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau, that he is postponing the election. He asks them to inform Göring. By now it is 4 p.m. The two ministers immediately call Göring in Berlin, but Göring is no longer satisfied with a mere postponement of the election.

He dictates the next ultimatum:

*"The situation can only be saved if the Chancellor resigns immediately and Dr. Seyß-Inquart is appointed Chancellor within two hours."
If Mr. Seyß-Inquart is not appointed by 6:30 p.m., the German invasion of Austria will take place one hour later, at 7:30 p.m. This decision is irrevocable this time."*³⁸

After Seyß-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau conveyed this message to the Chancellor, Chancellor Schuschnigg gave up. He went to Federal President Miklas to offer his resignation. However, the President only approved the postponement of the referendum, which he himself considered a mistake. He refused, however, to dismiss Schuschnigg from office and appoint Seyß-Inquart in his place.

At 5:26 p.m., Göring called Vienna of his own accord to inquire about the situation. Upon hearing that the Federal President was not backing down, he sent Seyß-Inquart to the Federal President, this time accompanied by the German military attaché. The attaché reiterated Göring's demands and the ultimatum. However, the President refused to accept Interior Minister Seyß-Inquart as the new Federal Chancellor. He hastily summoned the President of the Austrian Supreme Audit Office and offered him the position. The President declined. Next, the Inspector General of the Army had to be summoned. He, too, refused to accept the office of Federal Chancellor.

It is now almost 6:30 p.m. Göring calls Vienna again. While Göring and Seyß-Inquart are still talking, Federal President Miklas dismisses the Chancellor and the Cabinet, but without appointing a new Chancellor. In another conversation at 8 p.m., Seyß-

³⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 5, page 251

³⁸ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 5, page 254

Seyss-Inquart informed Göring that the Inspector General had ordered the troops to withdraw and that Austria's leading figures were now clearly awaiting the invasion. Göring replied that he would now order the invasion and called upon Seyss-Inquart to then assume power in the country. Shortly after 8 p.m., former Chancellor Schuschnigg announced over the radio that he and his cabinet had resigned. Thus, on that night and on the day of the German invasion of Austria, no one knew who was in charge.

Austria is now a cauldron of unrest. Since Chancellor Schuschnigg lifted the party bans three days ago, Marxists, Social Democrats, National Socialists, the National Opposition, the Habsburg-loyal legalists, trade unions, the Heimwehr (Home Guard), and the Heimatschutz (Homeland Security) have been demonstrating and marching on foot and in convoys of trucks through the streets of all major cities. Police and the army have cordoned off squares and public buildings in many places with barbed wire and ostentatiously deployed machine guns. In the throng of people in the streets, one hears slogans like "Hail Moscow," "Hail Schuschnigg," "Down with Schuschnigg," "Hail Hitler," "Down with Hitler," "Long live Austria," "Long live Germany," and so on. The display of flags ranging from the red-white-red to the hammer and sickle to the swastika also reflects the current deep divisions within the Austrian population. The pro-government press tirelessly describes a vote in favor of Anschluss as treason against Austria, while the Deputy Minister of the Interior calls on people via radio to boycott the referendum.

A picture similar to that of the GDR in its final days, in which some celebrate the 40th anniversary of the GDR by the thousands with torches and parades, proclaiming that the wall will still be standing in 100 years, while others, also by the thousands, hold prayer services and chant "We are one people" at Monday demonstrations.

During the night, the tide turns. Former Chancellor Schuschnigg announces his resignation over the radio. Shortly afterward, the now caretaker Interior Minister Seyß-Inquart also appeals to the public for calm via radio. Suddenly, police in Vienna are wearing armbands with swastikas.

The anti-Anschluss demonstrations vanished as if overnight. Instead, a motorcade with swastika flags and torches on the cars moved through Vienna's city center. Chants outside the Ballhaus shouted: "Long live the new Austria!" and people demanded, "Seys-Inquart to the balcony!" At this time, Seyss-Inquart had still not been appointed as the new Federal Chancellor. Since this was clearly no longer to be expected, Hitler ordered the troops, who had been assembled on Austria's borders, to march in at 8:45 p.m. Only a short time later, Minister Göring tried to persuade Seyss-Inquart to officially request the entry of German troops.³⁹

³⁹ IMT Documents, Volume XXXI, Document 2949-PS/I 1

But the Austrian minister, who still intended to legally implement the Anschluss after the election, did not grant Göring this wish. Around 11 p.m., Federal President Miklas Seyß-Inquart finally appointed him as the new head of the Austrian government.

In the early hours of the new day – it is now Saturday the 12th.

March 1938 – German army troops marched towards Salzburg, Linz, and Innsbruck. Floral decorations and flags on the military vehicles were meant to signify that this was a reunification after many years of German division, not a campaign of conquest. This symbolism was understood as such. The Austrian population on both sides of the roads initially reacted kindly, then soon with growing enthusiasm. There were hugs, waves, handshakes, tears of joy, and flag-waving. When Hitler's motorcade rolled into the market square of Linz toward evening, 60,000 people were already waiting to welcome him. Hitler gave a short speech, which was repeatedly interrupted by thunderous applause. The enthusiasm of the crowd made a profound impression on him, as he had not been certain of the undivided support of the Austrians until then.

Chancellor Seyss-Inquart, recently sworn in by the Austrian Federal President, and several newly appointed federal ministers have come to Linz to greet Hitler. Seyss-Inquart, still not in favor of the invasion, suggests to Hitler that Austrian troops also be sent into the German Reich to show the world that this is a voluntary union and not a unilateral conquest. Hitler is taken with the suggestion and immediately orders it to be carried out. The very next day, Austrian troops march into Munich, Dresden, Stuttgart, and Berlin.⁴⁰

Up until Linz, Hitler apparently had no political plan for this invasion, which had not been planned until three days prior. He was still unclear how Austria was to be incorporated into the "Old Reich." Hitler, himself surprised by the rapid course of events, remained uncertain until the...

The overwhelming reception that the Austrians prepared for him in Linz was apparently initially intended only to allow him to co-govern Austria as a separate state in personal union.⁴¹ In Linz, he decided to annex Austria to the "Old Reich" as a new part of the Reich. Hitler could still decide whether to wait for the result of the now-postponed plebiscite and leave it to Seyss-Inquart to carry out the Anschluss, or whether to create a fait accompli beforehand. The large crowds in Linz and the enthusiasm of the people encouraged Hitler to do the latter.

On Sunday morning, March 13, 1938, at 1 a.m., the first Wehrmacht unit rolled into Vienna, the capital of Austria. Despite the night and the cold, the streets were packed with people. An Austrian military band had assembled in front of the opera house.

⁴⁰ IMT negotiations, Volume XV, page 664 ff.;

⁴¹ von Weizsäcker Papers, page 124

The city of Vienna welcomes the first German troops with an impromptu military parade. The police barricades, intended to separate the people from the marching Wehrmacht companies, soon collapse under the onslaught of the enthusiastic crowd. At 2:30 a.m., the first Wehrmacht battalion arrives at the Rennweg Barracks, where it is met by the 3rd Vienna Infantry Regiment with an honor guard, flag, and band. A similar scene unfolds upon the arrival of German troops at the border crossings into Italy and Yugoslavia. There, too, the Wehrmacht troops are ceremonially received by the Italian and Yugoslav border troops. The military invasion proceeds as if the political annexation of Austria had already taken place.

But Seyß-Inquart is still Chancellor and Miklas is President of Austria. Towards evening, however, Miklas announces his resignation as President. According to Article 77 of the current constitution, this transfers the President's powers to the Chancellor. Thus, for a very brief period, Seyß-Inquart is both head of government and head of state. Earlier that morning, Seyß-Inquart, as Chancellor, Glaise-Horstenau, as Vice-Chancellor, and Justice Minister Hueber had drafted and signed a new "Federal Constitutional Law" which states: *"Article I*

Austria is a country of the German Reich.

Article II

On Sunday, April 10, 1938, a free and secret plebiscite will be held among the German men and women of Austria over the age of 20 on reunification with the German Reich.

...

Article V

This Federal Constitutional Law enters into force on the day of its promulgation.
Power...

Vienna, March 13, 1938

*Seyß-Inquart, Federal Chancellor
Glaise-Horstenau, Vice Chancellor
Hueber, Minister of Justice* ⁴²

As a German counterpart to this, Adolf Hitler signed the "Law on the Reunification of Austria with the German Reich." The articles read:

"Article I

The Federal Constitutional Law on the Reunification of Austria with the German Reich of March 13, 1938, adopted by the Austrian Federal Government, hereby becomes German Reich law.

⁴² Benoist-Méchin, Volume 5, page 285

(The text of the Austrian law follows)
Article II

*The current law in force in Austria will remain in effect until further notice.
The introduction of imperial law in Austria was carried out by the Führer.
and the Chancellor of the Reich or the Reich ministers authorized by him.*

...

Article IV

*The law comes into force on the day of its promulgation.
Linz, March 13, 1938*

Adolf Hitler" ⁴³

Thus, the political annexation of Austria to the German Reich was completed in just a few short steps on the evening of March 13, 1938. First, as mentioned, Federal President Miklas cleared the way by resigning. Then, in Vienna, Seyss-Inquart, as acting president, promulgated the "Federal Constitutional Law" and immediately put it into effect according to Article V of the law. With this, Austria declared itself part of the German Reich and recognized German sovereignty to enact laws for Austria as well. As a final step, Reich Minister Goebbels announced in Berlin the

The "Law on the Reunification of Austria with the German Reich" now also applies to Austria. With this, Austria is declared part of the Reich by Germany as well, and Hitler has become head of state and government for this part of the Reich too. However, the Anschluss lacks the legitimacy of the election, which is not scheduled until April 10, 1939.

Since the beginning of the Dollfuss dictatorship five years ago, there have been no federal elections in Austria. Thus, it remains unclear how those who have not championed the Anschluss in recent years as strongly as the "National Opposition" and the Austrian National Socialists will vote in the plebiscite. It is quite possible that churches, trade unions, monarchists, socialists, and Marxists will vote not for Germany, but against the National Socialist Party of Austria. The risk that Hitler and Seyss-Inquart are taking on with this election is therefore considerable. Yet, on the very day of the Anschluss, the Consistory of the Evangelical Church declared its support for the Anschluss to the German Reich in a letter to its congregations. The letter reads:

*"The Evangelical Church of German-Austria stands united, joyful, and
resolute in the historical moment that leads the German people of Austria
back into the community of life and destiny of the German Reich. ..."*

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⁴³ Reichsgesetzblatt 1938/1, page 237, No. 21 German

⁴⁴ News Bureau of March 14, 1938



Fig. 3: The Viennese at the Prince Eugene Monument upon Hitler's arrival on March 15, 1938

A week later, the Catholic bishops wrote a pastoral letter regarding the plebiscite: *"Out of deepest conviction and of our*

own free will, we, the bishops of the Austrian ecclesiastical province, declare on the occasion of the great historical events in German-Austria: ...

On the day of the plebiscite, it is a self-evident national duty for us bishops to profess our allegiance to the German Reich as Germans, and we also expect all believing Christians to know what they owe their people." On April 3, a week before the plebiscite, the first post-war Chancellor, Dr. Renner, declared in an ⁴⁵

interview in the NEUES WIENER TAGEBLATT: *"As a Social Democrat and thus as a champion of the right of nations to self-determination, as the first Chancellor of the Republic of German-Austria and as former*

President of its peace delegation to Saint-Germain, I will vote YES."

46

Even before legitimation through an election, foreign countries also take a stand.

The governments in London and Paris both recognized the annexation on April 2nd, and Mussolini compared it to the unification of Italy in 1856. This also meant the abolition of Article 88 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain.

The plebiscite scheduled for April 10th became a confirmation of the Austrian founding fathers of 1918 and a triumph for those who wanted Anschluss. Of 4,284,795 voters, 4,273,884 voted for reunification.

Unification of Austria and Germany and 9,852 against.⁴⁷ That is 99.73% in favor of Anschluss.⁴⁸ In the German "Old Reich," a plebiscite on the same topic takes place on the same day. Here, 99.08% of the votes are in favor of Anschluss. The Germans in Austria and in the so-called Old Reich—as this election shows—were united on that April 10, 1938, by what constitutes a nation: the same language and culture, the shared history, the awareness of belonging together, and the will to belong together.

At this point, a look back at history is necessary. In October 1848, in St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt, the German National Assembly faced the question of whether Germany should become a "Lesser Germany" without Austria or a "Greater Germany" that included the Habsburg principalities. The decision was made in favor of "Lesser Germany" during the unification of the German Empire in 1871. 90 years after the St. Paul's Church Assembly...

⁴⁵ IMT documents, Volume XL, page 159; IMT

⁴⁶ documents, Volume XL, Document Neurath-130, page 523; Benoist-Méchin,

⁴⁷ Volume 5, page 309. However, Jews and

⁴⁸ other groups are excluded from the vote, which somewhat relativizes the 99%.

In a referendum on April 10, 1938, the people of Austria and Germany voted for the annexation of Austria to the German Reich. This also brought the name "Greater Germany" back into the spotlight. Therefore, in remembrance of 1848, the German Reich, including Austria, was also called the "Greater German Reich" from 1938 onward. This was a historical reference and not an expression of German megalomania.

The annexation of Austria in 1938 mirrored two events that had already occurred with the return of the Saar region in 1935 and the reoccupation of the previously unprotected Rhineland border in 1936. In the cases of Austria and the Saar, opponents of annexation linked their goals to a vote against the National Socialists, even though both elections were about entirely different issues, and subsequently lost. The Austrians, just like the Saarlanders, voted overwhelmingly in favor of annexation to the German Reich, seemingly supporting the party that advocated it. No one knows how many of the votes cast were primarily for annexation and how many were primarily for the party. Thus, Hitler emerged victorious both times, also with the votes of the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, the Christian Socialists, and all the others. The Allied powers, who in both cases in Versailles and Saint-Germain deliberately violated the right of peoples to self-determination, also paved the way for Hitler in this respect.

The second parallel can be seen in the annexation of Austria and the reoccupation of the Rhineland, which had been stripped of its German military presence. In both cases, the German high command warned that the next planned step would provoke foreign action. The generals were convinced that England, France, Czechoslovakia, and Poland would not tolerate violations of the Treaties of Versailles, Locarno, and Saint-Germain and would invade Germany. In both cases, Hitler better assessed the foreign reaction, and both times he was right. The consequence was that Hitler's self-confidence increased, while his trust in the judgment of his military advisors diminished.

This too would later prove to be Germany's downfall.

The victorious powers of the First World War viewed the annexation of Austria to the German Reich with apprehension and concern. With this step, postwar Germany stood as strong as it had been before 1914. The agreements of Versailles and Saint-Germain, guaranteeing Austria's perpetual independence from Germany, were abolished without France, England, or the USA even being consulted, let alone asked for their opinion. Thus, the victors of the First World War held the annexation of Austria in 1938 against the Germans in 1945. In the Nuremberg Trials, they accused the Reich government of annexing Austria as a violation of law and an act of conquest. For the Germans in Austria and the "Old Reich," the annexation looked different. With it, they were realizing what had already been decided in 1848 in St. Paul's Church.

They are putting into practice what Wilson granted in 1917 with the right of peoples to self-determination, what was agreed upon in the German-Austrian Unification Treaty of November 1918, what was a constitutional goal of the first constitutions of the new republics of Austria and Germany of 1918 and 1919, and what the people in both parts of Greater Germany have now impressively confirmed in a plebiscite: the reunification of the Germans.

Stresa, Abyssinia and the Rome-Berlin Axis

What does the Wal-Wal oasis have to do with the capital city of Vienna?

Both are settings in the same play, which in the previous chapter was described only in terms of its Austrian and German actors. However, the British, the French, the Abyssinians, and the Italians also play significant roles in this same play.

In 1915, when England, France, and Russia attempted to persuade Italy to break away from its alliance with Austria and Germany and switch sides, they offered the Italians South Tyrol, Istria, Dalmatia, western Albania, the protectorate over central Albania, the Dodecanese islands, and an expansion of the Italian colonial empire in exchange for their military support, should the German colonies fall to England or France after the war. This substantial wartime gain was guaranteed to Italy in writing in the Treaty of London on April 26, 1915.⁴⁹

After the war, London and Paris divided the German colonies in Africa, and Rome received virtually nothing in terms of the promised expansion of its colonial holdings. Southern Albania also did not become part of the Kingdom of Italy, as promised in 1915. The Italians therefore felt cheated out of the colonies promised in the Treaty of London after the First World War, just as the Germans felt cheated out of the peace terms of the Fourteen Wilson Points. Thus, Italy found itself in a rather uncomfortable position after the war. It could not be guaranteed that Austria and Germany would adhere to the Treaties of Saint-Germain and Versailles in the long term and renounce German South Tyrol forever. After all, Italy itself had made a similar commitment in 1915.

Italy's treaties with Germany and Austria were not upheld in spirit when they left the Triple Alliance and defected to Germany's enemies. On the other hand, Italy could no longer rely on the British and French either, because they had just broken the Treaty of London. Thus, in the postwar years, Italy was forced to constantly navigate between the competing interests of the British, the French, the Austrians, and the Germans.

⁴⁹ Wilson Documents, Volume 1, page 52

Two concerns weighed heavily on Italy in the post-war period. The first was the aforementioned South Tyrol problem, with its native German-speaking population that did not want to become Italian. The Italians observed the German-Austrian efforts to unify the two countries and feared that a united and once again powerful German-Austria might one day reconquer South Tyrol. Thus, the Italian post-war governments were the fiercest opponents of Austria's annexation by the German Reich.

The second concern relates to the enormous growth of Italy's own population. Even in the pre-war years, five to seven hundred thousand Italians emigrated annually because the country could not sustain the growing population. Italy needed colonial space to manage the population explosion at home.

At the London Conference of 1915, Italy, in its demand for another colony, had its sights set on the last remaining free and sovereign country in Africa: Abyssinia. The country would have offered arable land and valuable mineral resources. Furthermore, Abyssinia would have connected Italy's two African colonies, Somalia and Eritrea, in East Africa, forming a new central hub.

This was Italy's starting point after the First World War. It wanted to keep South Tyrol and gain Abyssinia.

England, which had itself acquired colonial possessions in Africa before the First World War, which promised Italy colonial acquisitions in 1915, and which annexed more than half of all German colonies in 1919, changed its stance with the acquisition of the German African territories. Great Britain henceforth focused on securing its spoils, calling this "preserving the status quo," and presented its new position at all international conferences from 1920 onward as "securing peace." The expression "securing the spoils" would have been more honest.

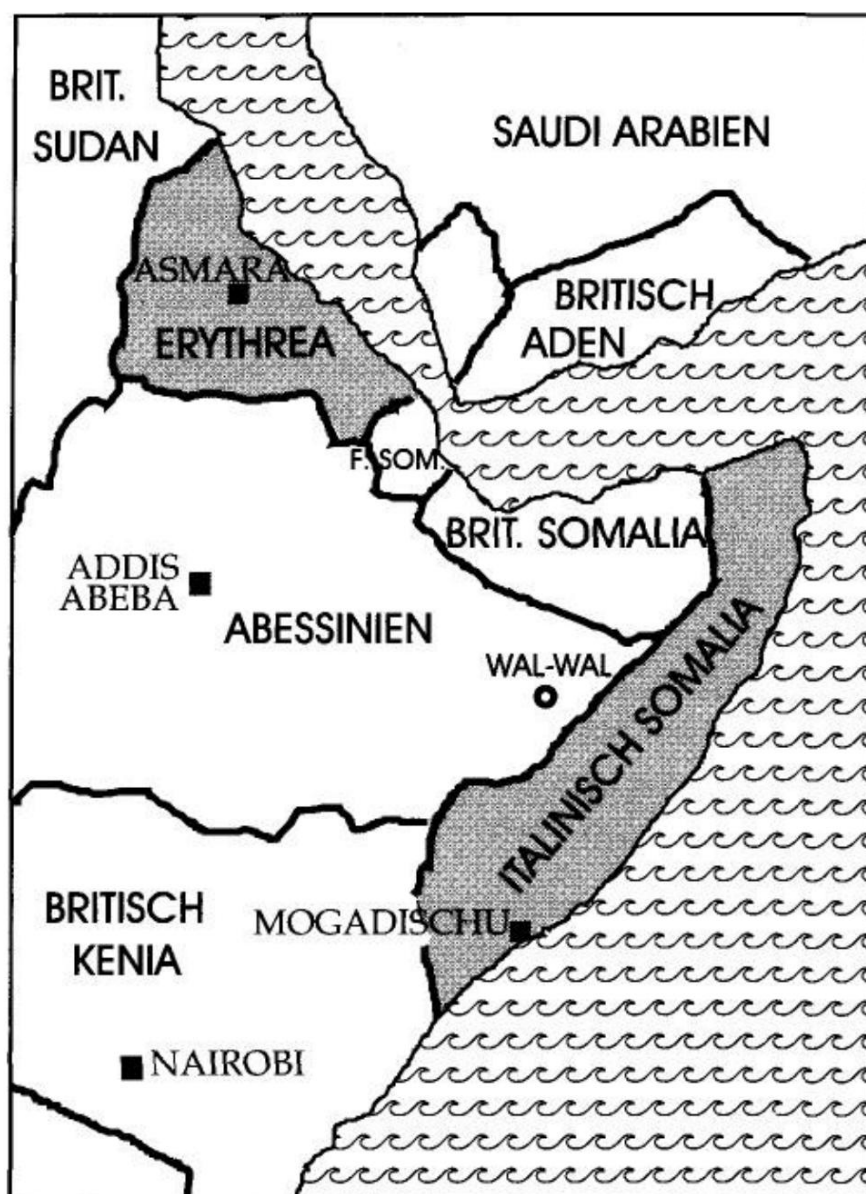
senior

France's greatest concern after the war was the defeated, yet still intact, German Reich. Thus, French governments attempted to maintain the loyalty of the major powers, England and Italy, against Germany.

However, this will now become difficult, as both states are in conflict and therefore seek closer ties with Germany.

During this period, Germany was primarily burdened by its economic worries. In addition, the Reich was attempting to resolve the problem of open borders and its lack of defense capabilities. And thirdly, the Reich governments continued their efforts to initiate the annexation of Austria. Until 1933, this remained the desire of both the governments in Berlin and Vienna.

When the two German states attempted to establish a customs union in 1931, they encountered vehement resistance from the Italians and French. Italy feared a German Reich extending to the Brenner Pass and thus to the borders of South Tyrol, and France feared an increase in the power of its German neighbor. In 1931, the governments in Paris and Rome thwarted the union.



Map 8: The Italian colonies Erythrea, Italian Somalia and from 1936 Abyssinia

German-Austrian Customs Union. In 1933, the dictatorship of Chancellor Dollfuss began in Austria, thus ending Vienna's desire for annexation. Austria suddenly found itself aligned with the French and the Italians.

Austria, previously Germany's partner, now seeks Italy's protection against further German pressure. Italy, through its patronage of Austria, can expect that Vienna will no longer make demands for South Tyrol and that Austria will also keep the German Reich at bay. France can henceforth count on Italy as an adversary of Germany, and Italy can be compensated for this with French backing in Abyssinia. Consequently, France, Italy, England, and Austria stand closely united in repelling German annexation ambitions. On February 17th and September 27th...

In 1934, France, England and Italy issued two joint declarations of guarantee for the independence of Austria from Germany.

On March 17 of the same year, Italy and Austria, and subsequently Hungary, concluded a consultation treaty agreeing to coordinate their foreign policies. And on January 7, 1935, the prime ministers of France and Italy signed the Treaties of Rome, in which they committed themselves for the third time to defend Austria against German annexation. Otherwise, the treaties defined the interests of both states in their colonies. In a secret military agreement following the Treaties of Rome, the French also gave the Italians a free hand in Abyssinia.⁵⁰

Finally, on April 12, 1935, representatives of England, France, and Italy met in Stresa on the shores of Lake Maggiore to guarantee Austria's security once again. Historical accounts refer to this, for the time being, last agreement between the three countries against Germany as the "Stresa Front."

England, France and Italy discuss a threat to Austria at the Stresa Conference, which does not exist at the time, and they silently ignore a dispute over Abyssinia that has been growing between the former partners England and Italy since December 1934.

Since the First World War, the Italians believed that their ambitions in Abyssinia did not infringe upon English or French interests, but they were mistaken. Between 1925 and 1934, Italy, in agreement with Abyssinia and England, attempted to build a railway line through Abyssinia connecting its colonies of Eritrea and Somalia. London agreed, securing the formerly German oil concessions in Iraq as payment. The Abyssinian government initially agreed to the agreement, but ultimately failed to honor it.

In 1934, border disputes arose between Italy and Abyssinia, leading to tensions between Rome and London. In the autumn of that year, the Abyssinian Emperor Haile Selassie laid claim to the Wal-Wal oasis in the border region between Italian Somalia and Abyssinia. The border there had never been precisely defined on maps. Italy had taken possession of the oasis five years earlier and had since settled and fortified it. Italy refused to cede it. Consequently, on December 5, 1934, Abyssinian troops captured Wal-Wal, the oasis on the border. Italy responded by transferring four infantry battalions to Somalia, which Britain interpreted as the beginning of Italy's conquest of Abyssinia. This marked the beginning of a new cycle of change in Europe. The partnerships forged during the First World War crumbled, and at the end of the Abyssinian conflict, Italy found itself on the...

⁵⁰ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 4, page 115

Germany's side. This allowed Austria to become part of the German Reich four years later, and with it, the capital city of Vienna.

The Abyssinian crisis simmered and burned from the Battle of Wal-Wal in December 1934 until the Italian conquest of Addis Ababa in May 1936. In the spring and summer of 1935, Italy deployed 170,000 troops—Alpine troops, infantry, and cavalry—to the borders of Abyssinia. Britain, unwilling to tolerate Italy's growing power in Africa, assembled a fleet of 134 warships in the Mediterranean, and Prime Minister MacDonald declared that the world was on the brink of a war like that of 1914. The Italian press reacted with outrage to Britain's veto, recalling the broken promises of 1915 and Britain's own colonial acquisitions in India and, more recently, in the Orange and Transvaal.

On October 3, 1935, Italian troops invaded Abyssinia, which was still free.

England mobilizes the League of Nations. Nearly 50 member states declare Italy the aggressor and impose an embargo and sanctions as punishment. Germany, not a member of the League of Nations, seizes the opportunity to break Italy out of the Stresa Front. Hitler offers Mussolini four million tons of coal, which will replace the canceled deliveries from England for a considerable period.

Now France is in a bind. It needs both England and Italy against Germany, which has been visibly rebuilding its armed forces for a year. Since the 1935 naval agreement, England has pursued a course of détente with Germany. And now the pressure of the League of Nations embargo is forcing the Italians to move closer to the Germans. England wants to supplement the embargo against Italy with an oil embargo. France, however, can prevent this and thus also a final shift of the Italians toward the Germans. But this shift can no longer be prevented the following year.

Hitler's coal offer is having an effect. As early as January 1936, Mussolini informs the German ambassador in Rome that he has no objection to Austria becoming a satellite state of the German Reich—albeit a formally independent one.⁵¹ In March, the next blow for France follows. Hitler orders German troops to march into the Rhineland. Now France demands sanctions against Germany from the League of Nations. England, which does not feel threatened by the re-entry of German troops into the Rhineland, refuses to comply with the French demands for sanctions. England's last embargo demands against Italy and the new French demands for sanctions against Germany overlap and block each other, to the benefit of Germany and Italy.

On May 9, 1936, the last Abyssinian troops surrendered, and Mussolini proclaimed the "Roman Empire" in Rome. The King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II,

⁵¹ ADAP, Series C, Volume IV, Document 485

Manuel III assumes the title of Emperor of Abyssinia. Mussolini now believes he no longer needs German support. He attempts to distance himself from Hitler and instead seek closer ties with France. Immediately after his war of conquest in Abyssinia, he feels called upon to defend Czechoslovakia and Austria against Germany. Mussolini rediscovers his old interest in keeping the Germans away from the Brenner Pass, and he sends a proposal to the French government to conclude a military pact against Germany.⁵² He offers France transit rights through Italy if it wishes to send troops against Germany in Czechoslovakia. In return, he demands French military aid if Italy is to "protect" Austria against Germany, and he wants recognition of the Kingdom of Italy's rule over Abyssinia.

Mussolini's offer came at the wrong time and fell on deaf ears. On June 4, 1936, France's left-wing parties formed a Popular Front government, which immediately made the fight against fascism its central tenet. This effectively closed the French door to Mussolini for good.

The USA and England also refused to recognize Italy's conquest of Abyssinia under international law. Thus, this recognition remained the primary objective of Roman foreign policy for the next few years. And Mussolini was now isolated. He had to find new allies. Austria remained allied with Italy, but Austria's relationship with Germany had been ruined since the death of Chancellor Dollfuss. Any détente between Rome and Berlin would certainly be strained by the German-Austrian animosity. Therefore, Mussolini urged the Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg to reconcile with the Germans. The result of this sound advice from Rome was the aforementioned "German-Austrian Agreement on Normalization and Friendly Relations" of July 11, 1936. Thus, Mussolini's Abyssinian adventure indirectly paved the way for the later annexation of Austria by the German Reich.

On October 24, 1936, Mussolini, the "Duce," sent his Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, to meet with Hitler and his Foreign Minister, von Neurath, to ascertain the extent to which the interests of their respective countries aligned. The result was announced on November 1. Mussolini officially switched sides from the camp of the victorious World War I powers to that of his former enemy, Germany.

On this day in Milan, the "Duce" delivers a public speech, proclaiming the "Rome-Berlin Axis." He invites all other states to participate in this axis. Thus, for the next eight years, the two hitherto isolated states of Italy and Germany become a partnership, with advantages and disadvantages for both "Axis powers."

⁵² Benoist-Méchin, Volume 4, page 192

In March 1938, when Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg attempted to secure Mussolini's backing for his referendum against the "Anschluss," Mussolini gave him the cold shoulder. Italy now accepted the Anschluss with the German Reich, which it had tried for years to prevent with France's help. Germany's coal aid during the League of Nations embargo and its recognition of the Italian Empire of Abyssinia bore fruit. The unification of the two German-speaking states, the German Reich and Austria, had, considering Italy's role in it, begun its long and arduous journey.

The next annexation, in which Mussolini played a key role, was that of the Sudetenland to the German Reich. But before the annexation of the Sudetenland and the subjugation of Czechoslovakia are discussed, a look must be taken at a power in the background: the USA, which until now has seemingly not been involved in the changes in Europe.

America in the background

An important player in the changes in Europe since 1933 is the American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, even if he still pulls the strings from behind the scenes.

In 1915, at the age of 33, Roosevelt was Under Secretary of the Navy. Even then, two years before America's declaration of war on Germany, the young Roosevelt urged President Wilson to wage war against Germany. Wilson then taught him a lesson: *"I will tell you something I cannot say publicly. I want to show history not only that we used every diplomatic means to stay out of the war, and to show that the war was deliberately forced upon us by Germany, but I also want to be able to stand before the court of history with clean hands."* After the First World War, Roosevelt never wavered in his conviction that the Kaiser and the Germans alone bore the blame for this great war.

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The United States of North America has been neutral since 1921. However, although the three presidents after World War I kept the US out of all wars in Asia and Europe, a new way of thinking has been taking hold in the States for some time now. Alongside widespread isolationism, a new interventionism is slowly but surely gaining ground. This is based on the conviction that democracy, as well as the rights and freedoms of the individual,

⁵³ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's War, page 49

The values of the United States are of universal validity, outweighing the sovereign right of states to determine their own nature and the lives of their citizens, both internally and externally. Roosevelt also adheres to this conviction, feeling called upon to export America's values to the world, if necessary even through war. This liberal-democratic internationalism of many Americans finds a parallel in the contemporaneous Marxist-Leninist internationalism insofar as both are convinced they represent the well-being of humanity, and both harbor a hidden readiness for war.

Roosevelt's relationship with the Germans since the First World War is also significant. The USA played a decisive role in shaping the global postwar order at the conferences of Versailles, Trianon, and Saint-Germain. However, their demands at that time—for the right of peoples to self-determination, for the establishment of democracy in foreign states, for freedom of the seas in peace and war, and for a lasting peace—were not fully realized, either at the victors' conferences or in the postwar period. Thus, since taking office as president in 1933, Roosevelt has been attempting to finally realize this American dream.

Roosevelt defended the punishments imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles throughout his life as just, and he demanded their continued enforcement. The right to self-determination of the "separated" Germans showed little interest in him. His relationship to principles is also puzzling in other respects. In his fight for democracy and human rights, for example, he vehemently denounced the human rights violations committed by the German Reich government. In contrast, the persecution, expulsion, and murder of members of the former upper class in Russia, as well as of large landowners, officers, and party officials—perpetrations he was also aware of—apparently had little impact on him. The mass "liquidation of class enemies" in the Soviet Union and the human rights violations in Poland and Czechoslovakia did not trouble him. He interpreted the despotically ruled Soviet Union as a transitional phase leading to a future social and just societal order. That German degenerate national socialism was the dictator Hitler's competing model to the somewhat older and already degenerate Russian socialism of the dictators Lenin and Stalin remained a mystery to Roosevelt. The differing assessments the president made of the German Reich and Poland are also difficult to fathom. In the later dispute over Danzig and an extraterritorial transport connection between East Prussia, which had been separated from Germany in 1920, and the Reich, Roosevelt undoubtedly sided with Poland. His primary concern was not the protection of the Polish state. Otherwise, he would certainly have taken a closer look at this equally authoritarian country, which until recently had been aggressive and anti-Semitic towards its neighbors. Nor was he concerned with the plight of the Jewish population in Germany. Otherwise, he would have treated the Poles in the same way.

like the Germans must be put in their place. After all, the number of letters of protest addressed to the US Congress between 1933 and 1937 regarding anti-Jewish measures in Poland far exceeded the number of similar complaints from the German Reich.⁵⁴ The American president's sole concern was to maintain the order that the US had helped to establish at Versailles. Roosevelt made this unequivocally clear immediately after Hitler's rise to power.

He, who immediately after taking office ordered the construction of 20 destroyers and 2 aircraft carriers for the fleet, insisted that Germany's armaments must remain at the low level stipulated in Versailles.⁵⁵ The entry of German troops into the Rhineland also angered the president. Further revisions to the post-war order of Versailles without the participation and approval of the USA would, for Roosevelt, constitute a dismantling of the power and leadership he felt he held there.

Roosevelt's concern for a more democratic, just, and secure world did not revolve solely around Germany. His harsh reactions, which swept into the wake of the German Reich from 1937 onward, initially originated in Japan and Italy. Neither had been compensated with the war profits they had been promised before entering the First World War, and both countries were no longer allies. Japan and Italy were fighting for equal rights with England, France, and the USA, and they were vying for prosperity, living space, and colonies.

Japan conquered Manchuria in 1931 and transformed it into a vassal state under its own rule. Italy annexed Abyssinia in 1936. Roosevelt now began to use his power to take action against both countries. He increased tariffs on Japan's main export, textiles, by 42% and lobbied all nations for an embargo against the Kingdom of Italy. As a result, Japan's efforts to achieve economic independence from the West intensified, and Italy joined the German Reich. Germany, too, aroused the president's suspicion at this time. Its withdrawal from the League of Nations, its economic boom, its rearmament, and the deployment of German troops in 1936 to the previously unprotected Rhineland demonstrated to Roosevelt that a new power was growing in the heart of Europe, a power that followed its own rules. Even before Hitler made any external demands, Germany had become a threat to the president.

Although the USA had committed itself to neutrality through a number of laws since 1921, Roosevelt began around 1936 to combat Germany, Japan, and Italy using various means and methods. From 1937 onward, the US...

⁵⁴ Congressional Record. House of Representatives Protocol of July 9, 1937, quoted in Hoggan, page 813

⁵⁵ Roosevelt's demand to Reichsbank President Schacht on May 6, 1933. See Tansill, page 63.

⁵⁶ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's Road to War, page 224

He limits US participation in the next war, always skirting the edge of the law. He uses the economic tools at his disposal in abundance: punitive tariffs, currency controls, freezing of foreign assets, and export bans on essential goods. And Roosevelt begins to publicly and "officially" ostracize the three aforementioned countries.

On October 5, 1937, the president delivered a speech in Chicago that became known as the "Quarantine Speech." In this address, Roosevelt lamented that "the reign of terror and international lawlessness" had taken forms that threatened "the foundations of civilization." He referred to Japan's war with China, Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, and Germany's unilateral withdrawal from the Treaty of Versailles. The president concluded that America, too, could one day become the target of such attacks.

To prevent such a thing, Roosevelt argued, "*all peace-loving nations must make a concentrated effort against those nations that are creating a state of international anarchy and instability from which there is no escape except through mere isolation and neutrality. The resistance of all peace-loving nations must take the form of a quarantine that isolates the peace-disturbers.*"

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With his "Quarantine Speech," Roosevelt outlined the basic principles of his policies for the coming years. These included the distinction between peace-loving and non-peaceful nations, the ostracization and isolation of the latter, the dissemination of fears about the non-peaceful, the abandonment of US neutrality, and the demand that all peace-loving nations side with America. A nuanced view of the problems of the Germans, Italians, and Japanese had as little place in this policy as the neutrality of other states. Thus, Roosevelt began quite early on to classify Germany as a rogue state and to strategically prepare America for the next world war.

The behavior of the Japanese provides him with a starting point. Since July 1937, Japanese troops had been advancing again into eastern China, where they encountered American interests. The USA maintained not only banks, industrial plants, missions, hospitals, schools, and trading and shipping companies in China, but also warships on the rivers, and they were building up modern air forces for the Chinese. Britain, too, had stationed gunboats on the rivers in China. On December 12, 1937, an incident occurred in which Japanese dive-bombers attacked American and British gunboats on the Yangtze River near Nanking, apparently believing them to be Chinese vessels. The US gunboat "Panay" was among those attacked.

⁵⁷ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's War, page 127

⁵⁸ Nanjing is the capital of the Republic of China at that time.

sunk. The Japanese government apologizes in Washington and pays for the damage.⁵⁹

Although the warships of the neutral United States had no business being in a war zone at that time, and although President Roosevelt was still legally bound to a policy of neutrality, he seized the opportunity to lay the groundwork for the later wars against Japan, Germany, and Italy. Shortly after the Panay Incident, still in December 1937, he dispatched Captain Ingersoll, head of the US Navy's War Planning Department, to London to initiate talks about future cooperation between the US and Royal Navys.⁶⁰ With this, Roosevelt became involved in British strategic considerations and planning. From then on, London could expect the US to support them in the event of a conflict with the Japanese in the Pacific, with the Italians in the Mediterranean, or with the Germans in the North Atlantic. The prospect of support from the naval power of the US strengthened Britain's freedom of action to pursue its own interests, if necessary even at the risk of war. Nearly a year later, Roosevelt continued down this path. In August and September 1938, he gave an informal promise of protection first to Canada and then to England,⁶¹ even though neither country had been threatened or attacked by anyone up to that point, and although Congress had not authorized him to do so.

Another of Roosevelt's moves worth mentioning here is his "World Peace Plan,"⁶² with which he attempted to forge an alliance of the "world community" for peace. The president initially revealed his plan only to British Prime Minister Chamberlain, to whom he wrote a top-secret letter on January 12, 1938. This date predates the time when Hitler demanded the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland.

Roosevelt was clearly pursuing two very different goals with his world peace plan. He wanted to establish the USA as the leading power on earth, and his plan was also intended to tame Italy and Germany. The scheme failed because the British Prime Minister, Chamberlain, saw through Roosevelt's scheme and sensed the danger the plan posed to England. In a secret letter on January 12th, the American president proposed a peculiar procedure to the British Prime Minister. He wanted to simultaneously invite ten selected small states to a conference he himself chaired in Washington and, at the same time, hold separate negotiations with England, France, Italy, and Germany, one after the other, to discuss his new world peace and economic order. The results of these conferences would then be sent to all other nations of the world and recommended for their signature.

⁵⁹ Dupuy and Dupuy, page 1124

⁶⁰ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's War, page 149

⁶¹ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's War, page 342

⁶² Bavendamm, Roosevelt's Path to War, pages 285 ff

With this complicated style of management, Roosevelt would have had absolute dominance. The ten smaller nations would have had virtually no weight next to the superpower USA, and the four major powers would have had no chance of forming an alliance to their own advantage and protecting their own interests during the separate negotiations. But that is not the only point Chamberlain refuses to accept. There are four more. The first is that the conferences were also to address free access for all states to all trade zones and raw material sources on Earth. Here, England would have had to make concessions in its colonies. The second is that Roosevelt, even in his letter, reserves for himself "freedom from political entanglements." This can only mean that, in an emergency, the USA itself would not have to adhere to its new world peace and economic order. The third is that

Roosevelt expresses that he desires "heartfelt support" but no supplementary proposals. And the fourth point of contention is the deadline. Roosevelt demands a response in just five days.

Chamberlain rejected this "world peace plan" in a letter dated January 13.

Roosevelt's World Peace Plan – though ultimately unsuccessful – was an attempt to elevate the United States from the role of first violinist to that of conductor. The president's ambition to single-handedly shape a new world peace and economic order suggests this. Secondly, the plan was an attempt to open up the colonial markets and resources of other nations to the United States. The decision to discuss the plan only with the British beforehand demonstrates the effort to transform England from an economic and naval competitor into a tethered ally. And thirdly, the plan was part of the quarantine policy. With the resolutions of ten smaller states and the approval of the British and French, Roosevelt could have forced the Germans and Italians to accept America's rules or, visibly, to place themselves outside the "community of nations."

Thus, Roosevelt asserted a claim to leadership abroad, even though Congress at home continued to insist on US neutrality. He had also already arranged the new British-American alliance for a future war, even before Hitler demanded the annexation of Austria. And he issued the two informal protection pledges to Canada and England precisely at the time when the German Reich government was negotiating with England, France, and Italy over German affiliation and the future of the Sudeten German citizens in Czechoslovakia.

The annexation of the Sudetenland and the subjugation of Czechoslovakia

Hitler's next success, bringing German people and German lands "home to the Reich," already contained the seeds of the Third Reich's later downfall. In September 1938, at the Munich Conference, Hitler succeeded in annexing the Sudetenland, the territories of Czechoslovakia where Germans had historically predominated, through threats and negotiations. The threat of forcing the annexation, if necessary with the Wehrmacht, led to a renewed alliance between the former world war enemies against Germany. With the annexation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia six months later, Hitler then gave these opposing states the pretext to side with Poland and against Germany in the Danzig Question, thus igniting another world war from what was initially a local border conflict between the German Reich and Poland.

The historical roots of Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia, an artificial state created only in 1919, was cobbled together after the First World War by the victorious powers from territories that had formerly belonged to Austria, Hungary, Germany, or Poland. Compared to the almost 1000-year history of these territories belonging to their neighboring countries, the mere 19 years of Czechoslovakia seemed to the governments in Vienna, Budapest, Berlin, and Warsaw in 1938 like the lifespan of a mayfly. The new Czechoslovakia lacked the legitimacy derived from its own history. This may have been one reason why the governments of all neighboring states, including Adolf Hitler's, denied the Czechs the right to statehood in 1938 and 1939.

The dual name Czechoslovakia suggests two different peoples or two different parts of the country. The name obscures the fact that the largest ethnic groups in the newly created state are Czechs and Sudeten Germans, not Czechs and Slovaks, and it fails to reveal that the new state has three constituent parts, not just two. Carpathian Ruthenia, in the far east of Czechoslovakia, with its Ruthenian-Ukrainian population, forms a separate territory. The closely related languages Czech and Slovak connect Czechs and Slovaks, yet history divides them. Alongside these are Slovaks and Ruthenians, who share a common history but speak two different languages.

The Czech Republic, with its two constituent countries of Bohemia and Moravia, became dependent on the Holy Roman Empire very early on. After 800, during the reign of Charlemagne, Bohemia and Moravia were initially obligated to pay tribute to the German emperor. Bohemia was first mentioned in the German Empire in 929 and definitively in 950.



Map 9: Czechoslovakia 1920-1938

Subjected to German kings and emperors. From 1041, both parts of the country belonged permanently to the German Empire until 1918. During this time, Bohemia, Moravia, and Germany were intertwined through a multitude of political alliances. In 1086, the German emperor bestowed the title of king upon the Duke of Bohemia. As early as 1257, the King of Bohemia became the seventh Elector to join the six German princes who had the right to elect the German king, who usually went on to become the German emperor. In 1310, the German House of Luxembourg acquired the Kingdom of Bohemia through the marriage of John of Luxembourg to Elizabeth, heiress to the Bohemian crown. With Emperor Charles IV, King Wenceslaus, and Emperor Sigismund, three kings of Bohemia from this line themselves became kings and emperors of the German Empire. During their reign, Prague served as the "capital" of Germany for almost a century. In 1526, Bohemia and Moravia passed by inheritance to the House of Habsburg, where they remained until 1918. Thus, the territory of present-day Czechia, and with it the Czech nation, was under German rule for almost 1000 years: nearly 500 years as part of the German Empire and over 400 years in the possession of the House of Habsburg. The Czechs' attachment to the Habsburg Empire was still so strong in 1917 that the Czech deputies in the Imperial Council in Vienna protested when the British and French governments, at the request of US President Wilson, declared the liberation of the Czechs and Slovaks from Habsburg rule as one of their war aims. They declared in writing:

"In light of the Allied response to President Wilson, which mentions the liberation of the Czechs as a war aim, we reject this demand, which is based on entirely false assumptions. We declare further-

emphatically, the Czech people, as always in the past, are convinced that their prosperous development is only assured under the Habsburg scepter and within the Habsburg Monarchy."⁶³ What the Czechs have long been emphatically demanding for

themselves, however, is an autonomous Kingdom of Bohemia with the same status that Hungary enjoys within the Habsburg Empire. Adolf Hitler, having grown up in and been shaped by old Austria, therefore obviously does not see the Czechs as the independent nation we see them as today. Despite centuries of political, economic, and cultural integration into the German Reich, the Czechs themselves maintain their own language and national identity, which they establish as the state language and national consciousness with the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1919, and which they naturally do not want to lose in 1939.

On the one hand, the Czech population of Bohemia and Moravia increasingly used the German language in art, economics, and science until 1918 and gained political influence in parliament and at court in Vienna. For example, the Czech Count Clam-Martinitz served as Austrian Prime Minister from 1916 to 1917. On the other hand, many Czechs have felt oppressed by the German Habsburgs for centuries. The memory of the religious struggle of the Catholic Habsburg dynasty against the Czech Hussites and Calvinists in the 15th and 17th centuries lives on in the Czech sense of identity as an anti-German sentiment that persists into the modern era. Thus, they still perceive the murder of their reformer Jan Hus in 1415 at the Council of Constance as a blatant breach of faith and a crime committed by the Germans against the Czechs. Hus was summoned to the Council with assurances of his free return, and there, with the approval of the Bohemian King and German Emperor Sigismund, he was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake.

A second religious uprising also ended in disaster. In 1618, the Protestant Czech nobility rose up against the Counter-Reformation being pursued in Bohemia by the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II. The revolt ended in 1620 with a Czech defeat at the Battle of White Mountain near Prague. The nobility subsequently lost not only their rights but also their estates, which mostly passed into German hands. The depth to which this defeat was etched into the historical consciousness of the Czechs became evident in 1925, when the Czechoslovak government attempted to restore the Czechs' land rights of 1620 through a land reform.

Historically, the Slovaks have followed a different path. Since 906, Slovakia has been torn between Czech, Hungarian, and Polish claims to power, before finally uniting with the Czech Republic in 1918.

⁶³ Ingram, page 95

Carpathian Ruthenia became part of the Hungarian kingdom. Thus, Slovaks and Ruthenians – although different peoples – were united under the Hungarian crown from 1918 to 1919. Only when Hungary became part of the Habsburg Empire did the Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians come into political contact under this umbrella. The collapse of the Habsburg Empire at the end of the First World War offered Czech and Slovak exiles in the USA the opportunity to petition the victorious powers in Saint-Germain for their own country. On May 30, 1918, representatives of Czech and Slovak exile organizations concluded an agreement in Pittsburgh, USA, to jointly establish their own state in the future. In the treaty text, the Czechs assured the Slovaks of:

"Slovakia will have its own administration, parliament, and courts. The Slovak language will become the official language in schools, government offices, and public life in general."
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Hoping for equality in the newly created state of Czechoslovakia, the Slovaks pledged themselves to the linguistically related Czechs for the next 20 years.

The Ruthenians, who call themselves Carpathian Ukrainians, also ended up in the state of Czechs and Slovaks through a similar agreement to the one concluded between exiled Czechs and exiled Ruthenians in Cleveland, USA. They considered themselves part of the larger Ukrainian people, divided between the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, based on their ethnicity. After a long period of foreign rule, they aspired to a new, unified Ukraine⁶⁵ rather than to join the Czechs and Slovaks. Their undisguised desire for a Greater Ukraine earned them suspicion and opposition in Warsaw and Moscow.

Czechoslovakia as a multi-ethnic state

In 1938, Czechoslovakia had a population of 6.7 million Czechs, 3.1 million Germans, 2 million Slovaks, 734,000 Hungarians, 460,000 Ruthenians (Ukrainians), 180,000 Jews, 75,000 Poles, and 240,000 people of other origins. Czechs thus constituted less than half of the population of their own country.

The diverse mix of peoples is primarily the result of the victorious powers' intention to divide the once-powerful Austria-Hungary into numerous states. Thus, people and territories were assigned to a new state whose population and territories had never before in history formed a single entity, let alone a unified state. The status of this new state is defined in the Treaties of Saint-Germain, Trianon, and Versailles.

⁶⁴ ODSUN documents, page 483

⁶⁵ The last independent Ukraine was divided between Russia and Poland in 1667.



Map 10: The multi-ethnic state of Czechoslovakia

stipulated⁶⁶. The agreements stipulate that each of the aforementioned Minorities were to retain their internal autonomy in the new Czechoslovakia. This was also promised by the Czech exiles. The Czech delegate Eduard Beneš communicated this intention as a promise to the victorious powers of Versailles in a note dated May 20, 1919.

"The Czechoslovak government intends to organize its state in such a way that it adopts as the basis of nationality rights the principles that are enshrined in the constitution of the Swiss Republic, i.e., it wants to make the Czechoslovak Republic a certain kind of Switzerland."

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However, only the exiled Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians formed an alliance for this new state.⁶⁸ The other ethnic groups ended up in this new state without being asked, through the dictates of the victorious powers and through the use of force.

Even the 1920 constitution of the newly formed Czechoslovakia did not fulfill its promises of autonomy for all minorities. Only the Ruthenians were granted an autonomous region, Carpathian Ruthenia, under Article 3. This article guaranteed them their own national parliament with the power to enact laws on matters of language, education, religion, and local administration.

⁶⁶ Articles 27 and 53 to 58 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, Articles 27 and 48 to 52 of the Treaty of Trianon, and Articles 27 and 81 to 86 of the Treaty of

⁶⁷ Versailles (Wellems,

⁶⁸ page 127), Czechoslovak Emigrant Agreement of May 30, 1918 in Pittsburgh (USA), and the Czechoslovak-Ruthenian Agreement of Cleveland (USA)

The Czechs no longer recognize their promise to the Slovaks, made in exile at Pittsburgh, and deny them their own national parliament. The Germans, Hungarians, and Poles are not considered in this regard either. Like the Slovaks, they are only protected by minority articles in the state constitution: *"Article 128.2 Differences in religion, belief, denomination, or language shall, within the framework of general laws, not constitute an obstacle for any citizen of Czechoslovakia in access to public service, offices, positions of honor, or the exercise of any trade."*

Article 128.3 The right to use one's mother tongue.

Article 131 In cities and districts with a significant number of citizens who speak a language other than Czech, bilingualism prevails in educational institutions.

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The Sudeten Germans

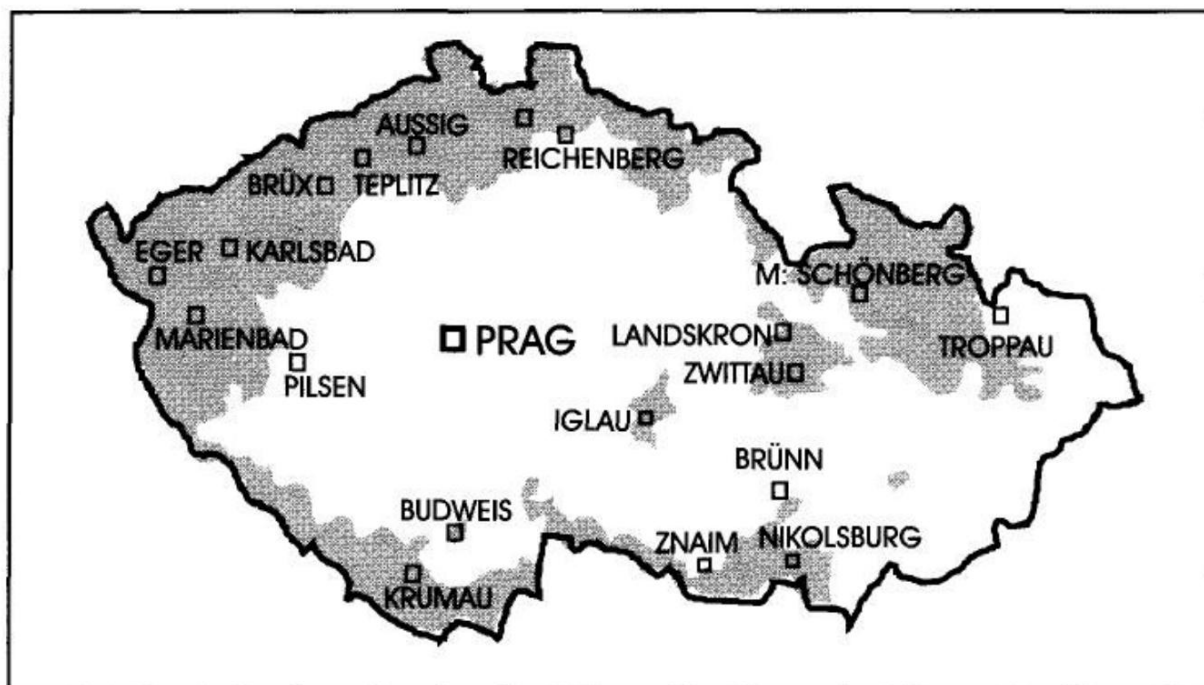
The name Sudeten Germans derives from their homeland, the Sudetes, as the mountain ranges around Bohemia and Moravia were called until 1945. After the Migration Period, following the departure of the Germanic Marcomanni, the territory of Bohemia and Moravia was taken over by the advancing Slavic Czechs. From 1204 onwards, several generations of Bohemian kings invited German farmers, craftsmen, and merchants to settle and develop their lands, resulting in the German-speaking settlement of the border regions of Bohemia and Moravia and some language islands in the interior, which remained so for over 700 years. Like the Czechs, the Sudeten Germans were part of the Habsburg Empire for the last four centuries. Therefore, it is natural that after the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, they initially felt they belonged to Austria.

With the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, the fate of the Sudeten Germans seemed uncertain for a brief moment. On October 29, 1918, the representatives of the constituencies in the contiguous German settlement areas of Bohemia, North Moravia, and Austrian Silesia proclaimed the "Province of German Bohemia" and informed the Viennese National Assembly that the province was to become part of German Austria.⁷⁰ On November 21, they sent a note to the American government via Swedish intermediaries, requesting for themselves the right of self-determination proclaimed by President Wilson.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Constitution of the Republic of Czechoslovakia of 29 February 1920

⁷⁰ ODSUN documents, page 494

⁷¹ ODSUN documents, page 502



Map 11: The Sudetenland

Despite these clear votes, the Sudeten Germans were forcibly incorporated into the Czech and Slovak state in 1918 and again in 1919 by decree of the victorious powers. First, the Czechs took advantage of the capitulation of the Habsburg and German Empires and occupied the German-occupied Sudetenland in November 1918.

The Sudetenland encompassed parts of Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia, extending to the mountain ridges. By November 18th, Czech legionaries had marched into the German cities of Aussig, Karlsbad, Troppau, Komotau, and Eger, without the German inhabitants being able to prevent it. On March 4th, 1919, pro-Austrian demonstrations took place in these cities, expressing the desire to belong to Austria. However, Czech troops fired into the crowds of demonstrators. This victory of the Czechs over their new minority cost 54 Sudeten Germans their lives and several hundred were wounded. On June 2nd, 1919, the victorious powers in Saint-Germain-en-Laye officially ratified this annexation by the Czechs. They presented Austria's first post-war Chancellor, Dr. Renner, with the "peace terms" under which the Sudetenland was incorporated into Czechoslovakia.

Renner left no stone unturned. On June 15, he lodged a protest in Saint-Germain, claiming the right to self-determination of peoples, proclaimed by US President Wilson, for the Sudeten Germans as well. He demanded a plebiscite on the future territorial affiliation of the disputed territories. He also invoked the resolution of the freely elected representatives of German Bohemia that their constituencies wished to become part of German Austria. However, the USA and France, against the vote of England, decided in favor of the Czechs at the Saint-Germain Conference.

Burdens on the Sudeten Germans. They replied to Chancellor Renner—as they had previously—As already mentioned, —, that the right to self-determination did not apply to the defeated and prohibited a plebiscite in the territories where people of German mother tongue lived. Thus, in 1919, over three million Sudeten Germans became citizens of Czechoslovakia against their will. The values of democracy and the right to self-determination, for which England, France, and the USA had sent their men to fight before their victory, lost their normative power after the victory.

The victory at the Treaty of Saint-Germain was primarily the result of pressure exerted by the exiled Czechs on the victorious Allied powers. Masaryk – later the first president of Czechoslovakia – and the aforementioned Beneš – later the second president – had good reasons to complete their new state with German Bohemia and the German-populated areas in North and South Moravia. The first reason lay primarily underground. The Sudetenland contained significant deposits of iron, coal, and oil, as well as silver, lead, mercury, and graphite, which formed the basis of a sizable chemical industry, ironworks, glassworks, and foundries. Only through the annexation of the German border regions of Bohemia did the new Czechoslovakia rise from an agrarian to an industrial nation. Four-fifths of the new state's industry was located in the Sudetenland. The second reason lay in the country's topography. Only the inclusion of the German-populated fringes of Bohemia up to the crest of the Bohemian Forest and the Ore Mountains gives the new country an external border that can be easily defended in case of war.⁷² Thus, over three million German-speaking citizens from the old Habsburg realm find themselves, through the claims of the Czechs and the ruling of the victors, in a country to which they do not want to belong, and which, moreover, does not want them either. Natural resources, industry, and the consolidation of territory are what motivate the Czechs to demand the Sudetenland for their new state.

It's not the people who live there. Since the second half of the 19th century...

In the 19th century, a current of thought arose among the Czechs that perceived the Germans in Bohemia as "foreign" and sought separation from them. This hostile attitude towards the Sudeten Germans intensified as the prospect of their own state grew. In 1919, after the collapse of Austria-Hungary and before the start of the victors' conference in Saint-Germain, this was openly discussed in Czech publications. For example, in 1919, a Czech jurist named Stihule published a memorandum entitled "The Czechoslovak State in International Law," in which he assessed the position of the German Bohemians in his new state as follows:

"... The German, as an enemy of humanity, cannot exercise the right to self-determination according to his selfish needs. ... It

⁷² Natural resources, industries, and the strategic value of the border regions were cited by Beneš in his Memorandum No. 3 at the Saint-Germain Conference in 1919, among other reasons, for the proposed border demarcation. See ODSUN documents, pages 551 ff.

The Slavs are the ones at whose expense the Germans have expanded, and this injustice, in the opinion of humanity, must be rectified; that is, the German people must return this territory to its rightful owners. ... The Germans living in our state do not constitute a historical-political individuality that alone can be the bearer of the right to self-determination.

These are the original colonists..."

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Furthermore, Stihule writes about the assimilation of the German Bohemians and the future fragmentation of the German settlement areas within the new borders. He concludes his thought with the sentence:

"If this process does not proceed quickly enough, we will proceed with the expulsion of the German element if it threatens our national security."

Back to the beginning of Czechoslovakia. In 1919, the newly formed nation of Czechs and Slovaks consisted of 48% Czechs, 28% Germans, 14% Slovaks, 7% Hungarians, and 3% Ruthenians. In the first years after its founding, the new country developed into a centralized state controlled by the Czechs. The state apparatus, police, and military were predominantly Czech and in no way reflected the proportions of the different ethnic groups. The economy, schools, and administration in the towns and villages, which until then had been purely and predominantly German-speaking, were forcibly Czechized against the will of the local population and also against the guarantees of the constitution. 354 German elementary schools and 47 secondary schools had to be closed.

sen schließen⁷⁴, about 40,000 German civil servants are removed from service. The German cities are renamed and given Czech names.

Eger becomes Cheb, Aussig becomes Ústí nad Labem, and so on. Even the German street names are changed. All German land acquisitions since 1620 are expropriated in a so-called land reform and "returned" to the Czech population. The reform also includes the division of large estates in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, whereby the redistributed land was previously 43% in German hands, 42% in Hungarian hands, and only 15% of the expropriated land affects Czechs.

The provisions of the Treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon, which aimed to develop Czechoslovakia into a federal state with equal rights for all peoples, were never implemented. The spirit of the Czechoslovak constitution also ceased to have any influence.

Even the Slovaks, whose agreement had been the very reason for the founding of this state, remained excluded from the distribution of power for a long time. The tensions

⁷³ ODSUN documents, pages 539 ff.

⁷⁴ Bernhardt, page 31,

⁷⁵ 1620, in the Thirty Years' War, the Catholic League defeats the Protestant League at the Battle of White Mountain. Static Bohemia.

⁷⁶ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page 50

The conflicts between Czechs on one side and Slovaks and Ruthenians on the other therefore led to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1939. But more on that later.

The Czechs, too, are unhappy with the numerous and large minorities within their state. The German-Bohemian minority, in particular, causes them difficulties. As early as 1920, complaints abound about the unwillingness of the Germans, in the districts and municipalities where they still constituted a majority, to use Czech in government offices and schools and to accept Czech mayors and officials. The German-Bohemians are accused of being disloyal to their new state and of striving for annexation by Austria or Germany.

During the 1920s and 30s, the Sudeten Germans' resentment towards the Czechs' dominance and self-serving practices in the new state steadily increased. The German ethnic group initially expressed its views in a fragmented manner, forming several parties. As a result, it remained politically without influence for a long time. It was not until 1933 that a 35-year-old Sudeten German named Henlein succeeded in uniting the German-speaking citizens of Czechoslovakia in a movement he called the "Sudeten German Home Front." Henlein recognized Czechoslovakia as the state of the Sudeten Germans, but he attempted to preserve and, where necessary, enforce the culture, rights to their homeland, economic standing, and jobs of the German population in their new state.⁷⁷ The Sudeten German Home Front soon evolved into the "Sudeten German Party" (SdP), which became the strongest party in the country in the May 1935 elections. The Prague government conjured up the rise of the Sudeten German Party (SdP) against its will. It dissolved two of the German parties and drove their voters to the new one. In July 1936, the SdP, with 44 seats, also became the strongest faction in the Prague National Assembly. It was followed by the predominantly Slovak Agrarian Party, which henceforth provided the Prime Minister, Milan Hoxha. Both the Sudeten Germans and the Slovaks pressed for the internal autonomy of the nations within the multi-ethnic state of Czechoslovakia, as promised in the Treaty of Saint-Germain.

In February 1937, Henlein attempted to introduce a "Law for the Protection of the People" into the Prague National Assembly. The draft law called for the reform of the constitution and the autonomy of the many ethnic groups within the state. The proposal was explosive for Czechoslovakia, because in addition to the Sudeten Germans, the country also contained Hungarians, Ruthenians, and Slovaks, who were deeply opposed to the centralization policies and Czechification of their land. In September 1937, Henlein held an inconclusive meeting with Prime Minister Hoxha regarding the question of German self-government. Further talks ensued.

⁷⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page 59

⁷⁸ The parties dissolved by the Czechoslovak government in 1935 are the German National People's Party. Party and the German National Socialist Workers' Party

Hoxha subsequently refused to answer this question. In October, during the municipal elections, an open confrontation erupted between Czechs and Sudeten Germans. Henlein, who at that time was still fighting for the future of the Germans within Czechoslovakia, sent President Beneš a formal ultimatum demanding that he declare the internal autonomy of the Sudetenland. Beneš did not even acknowledge Henlein's ultimatum with a reply.

Henlein's letter to Beneš immediately fell into the hands of the press in the German Reich without Henlein's knowledge and was published there before it had even reached Beneš. This created the false impression that Henlein was collaborating with the German Reich. The leader of the Sudeten Germans was subsequently unable to clear himself of this suspicion. Since he had found no support from Hoxha and Beneš, and apparently would not find any support from them, and since he was now considered a German collaborator anyway, Henlein addressed a written request to Hitler on November 19, 1937, asking him to support the German population in Czechoslovakia.⁷⁹ This was his first external appeal for help, the final step before the official request to annex the Sudetenland to the German Reich.

German interference in the Czech Sudetenland crisis

In February 1938, Hoxha and Beneš offered the Sudeten Germans concessions regarding the preservation and recognition of the German language and culture, but they linked this offer to a sharp rejection of all demands for autonomy for the nations within Czechoslovakia. However, the recognition of the German language and culture was merely what the Sudeten Germans were already entitled to under the Czechoslovak constitution. The Sudeten German population could no longer be won over with cultural concessions alone. Unemployment and material hardship among the Germans, who were economically disadvantaged by the Czech state in their own territories, exacerbated the conflict. Spontaneous demonstrations by Sudeten Germans took place in Eger (now Cheb), Reichenberg (now Liberec), Aussig (now Ústí nad Labem), and Komotau (now Chomutov). The Czechs reacted harshly with police operations, house searches, arrests, and court proceedings. The multi-ethnic crisis in Czechoslovakia thus unexpectedly transformed from a political dispute into an open violent conflict.

On February 20, 1938, Hitler spoke publicly for the first time about the fate of the Germans in Czechoslovakia. In a speech to the Reichstag, he addresses the situation of Germans in Austria and Czechoslovakia, stating, among other things:

⁷⁹ ADAP, Series D, Volume II, Document 23

⁸⁰ This is the first speech ever broadcast on television – albeit only within Berlin.

"Two of the states bordering our borders alone encompass a population of 10 million Germans. Until 1866, they were united with the entire German people in a constitutional union. ... They were prevented from uniting with the Reich against their own will through peace treaties ... the constitutional separation from the Reich cannot lead to a deprivation of their political rights."

This means that the general rights of national self-determination, which, incidentally, were solemnly guaranteed to us in Wilson's Fourteen Points as a prerequisite for the armistice, cannot simply be disregarded because these are Germans.

Just as England represents its interests across the globe, so too will present-day Germany know how to represent and protect its interests – albeit much more limited ones. And among these interests of the German Reich is the protection of those German citizens who are unable on their own to secure the right to universal human, political, and ideological freedom.

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Regarding the aforementioned 10 million Germans abroad, everyone at home and abroad knows that Hitler meant not only the 6 million German-Austrians but also the over 3 million Sudeten Germans.

Despite the dig at England, the German Chancellor's support for the Germans in Czechoslovakia also met with some understanding.

among a segment of the British public. For example, the English media czar Rothermere commented in the Daily Mail on May 6, 1938: *"The Germans are a very*

patient people. I cannot imagine for a moment that Great Britain would have stood idly by for twenty years while three and a half million Britons lived under the yoke of a thoroughly despised people who speak a foreign language and have a completely different national worldview. As far as I know my countrymen, they would have intervened against such a rape after a few years." Hitler, in his February speech before the Reichstag, did not yet demand annexation. He did not add fuel to the fire. He merely demanded the right to self-determination for Germans living abroad, very cleverly referring

to US President Wilson's earlier promise.

That Hitler had already spoken to Foreign Minister von Neurath and the highest-ranking generals and admirals of the Wehrmacht a quarter of a year earlier, on November 5, 1937, about a later war against Czechoslovakia, is not known to the public until now.⁸² In this secret speech last November-

⁸¹ Domarus, Volume 1, pages 801 f

⁸² The Hitler speech recorded by Colonel Hoßbach, see Domarus Volume 1, pages 748ff.

But Hitler had revealed to the generals that he considered Czechoslovakia a threat to Germany's rear in the event of future armed conflicts with England or France, and that he planned to annex it at the first suitable opportunity. Preparations for such a conquest of Czechoslovakia were not mentioned, let alone ordered, on November 5, 1937. Henlein did not learn, and would not learn, anything of this secret Hitler speech. He had known only since Hitler's public Reichstag speech of November 20.

February 1938 only that he could count on the support of the German Reich government in the future.

On March 12, 1938, Austria was annexed by Germany. Even after the annexation of Austria, to which the Sudeten Germans still felt they belonged, they initially demanded nothing more publicly than self-governance within Czechoslovakia. To demand more would have been high treason. Nevertheless, the annexation of Austria by Germany brought the issue of Czechoslovakia to the forefront of the agenda in London, Paris, and Moscow. There was a suspicion—justifiably so—that Hitler, because of the Sudeten Germans and to rid himself of the Czechs at his own back, might next conquer Czechoslovakia. From the annexation of Austria onward, Germany was therefore suspected of wanting to attack Czechoslovakia. Thus, discussions began between Prague, London, Moscow, and Paris on how to counter this should such an event occur.

Two weeks after the annexation of Austria, on March 28, 1938, the leader of the Sudeten Germans, Henlein, met for the first official meeting with the "Führer," Adolf Hitler. The annexation of the Sudetenland to the German Reich was not discussed at this meeting either.⁸³ However, Hitler knew by then that the Sudeten Germans wanted to be incorporated into Germany and Austria, which had just been united to form the "Greater German Reich." He was unsure, however, how France, the Soviet Union, and England would react to such an annexation. Thus, he did not yet dare to publicly demand this annexation himself, let alone carry it out. Hitler and von Ribbentrop advised Henlein, however, to make maximum demands of the government of Czechoslovakia, whose goal was "the full freedom of the Sudeten Germans."

Otherwise, Hitler puts Henlein off:

"The Reich will not intervene on its own initiative. He is responsible for the events that will unfold." Henlein, initially responsible himself."⁸⁴

Since the aforementioned generals' meeting in November 1937, Hitler had been secretly playing a double game. While he continued to keep quiet about Henlein, in December 1937 he changed the directives within the Wehrmacht. For the first time, he ordered plans for a later conquest of Czechoslovakia to be drawn up "and thus

⁸³ ADAP, Series D, Volume II, Document 107

⁸⁴ ADAP, Series D, Volume II, Document 107

to develop the solution to the German space problem.”⁸⁵ Up to this point, the Wehrmacht had only considered and prepared for a war with Czechoslovakia in connection with possible French war intentions. In such a scenario, Czechoslovakia had always been the second enemy in a two-front war feared by the Germans. With Hitler’s new directive of December 21, 1937,⁸⁶ Czechoslovakia became a direct target of war and conquest. Now it was no longer solely about the “return” of the Sudeten Germans. Now Czechoslovakia, as an expansion of German living space and as a permanent military risk to Germany’s security, was on Hitler’s agenda. The new directive left the timing of a German attack open. One passage on this topic reads:

"If the political situation does not develop in our favor, or only slowly, then the triggering of the attack will have to be postponed for years." "Green" is "Green" from unse- 87

henceforth the Wehrmacht's code name for Czechoslovakia. Hitler is having preparations made internally for the conquest of Czechoslovakia, while publicly demanding nothing more than that the government in Prague "treat the Sudeten Germans decently." On April 21, 1938, Hitler orders Colonel General Keitel, Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, to look into Czechoslovakia. He is to have the possibility of a Wehrmacht attack against Czechoslovakia investigated, according to Hitler.⁸⁸ The transcript of the conversation bears the heading

"The basis for the study: , Green".

Even in this first conversation, Hitler leaves the timing of such an undertaking completely open. He tells Keitel 'that he has no intention of launching an attack for the time being' and that he intends to wait for a Czech incident as a pretext for his action.⁸⁹ The transcript of this meeting between Hitler and Keitel begins with the sentence: *'A strategic attack out of the blue without any cause or possibility of justification is rejected.'*⁹⁰

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Hitler cites two different reasons to Keitel for the now-demanded preparations for a military confrontation with Czechoslovakia. The first is concern for the future of the Sudeten Germans. The second concerns the strategic importance of Czechoslovakia for Germany. Hitler refers to this as...

"An untenable situation for us, once the major conflict in the East... especially with Bolshevism, comes. It is his

⁸⁵ IMT, Volume XXXIV, Document 175-C

⁸⁶ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Page 547 (Annex 1 to the corresponding directive of 7 December 1937)

⁸⁷ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, page 547 (Annex 1 to the corresponding directive of December 7, 1937)

⁸⁸ Domarus, Volume 1, pages 851 ff. and Keitel, page 222;

⁸⁹ IMT, Volume X, page 569;

⁹⁰ ADAP, Series D, Volume II, Document 133

*most sacred conviction that the greatest danger to the Reich came from here. Czechoslovakia would then become the springboard for the Red Army. and a landing strip for their air force."*⁹¹

With this, Hitler makes it clear once again, following his aforementioned speech recorded by Colonel Hossbach, that he considers Czechia a problem for Germany not only because of the Sudeten Germans. He sees the neighboring country to the east primarily as an ally of states that are ideologically or politically opposed to Germany. And he sees Czechia as "new living space in the East."

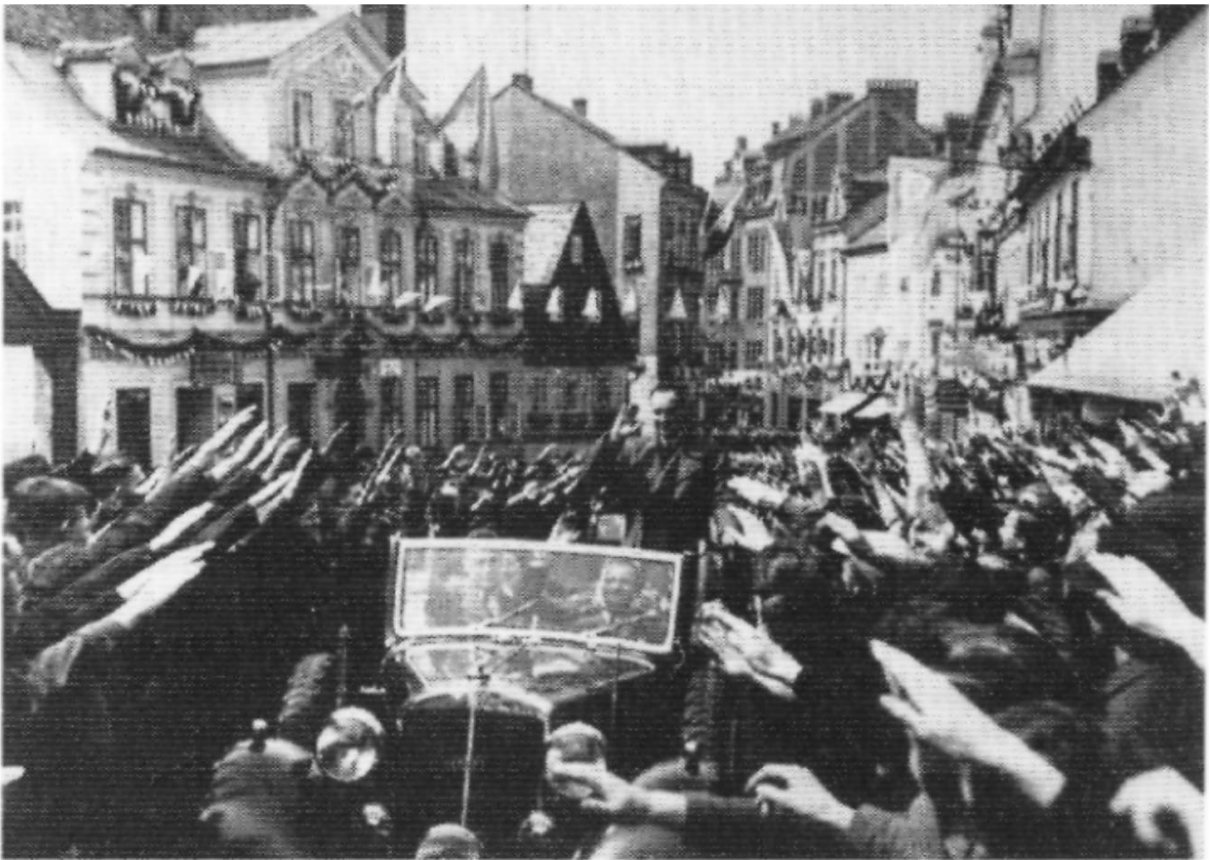


Fig. 4: Konrad Henlein on his way to a rally of the Sudeten German Party on May 6, 1938 in Asch

Henlein is still unaware of all this. He is still fighting for full autonomy for the Sudeten Germans within Czechoslovakia.

Henlein used the next SdP party congress in Karlovy Vary to announce an eight-point list of demands to the Prague government. In this "Karlovy Vary Program" of April 24, 1938, which Henlein immediately described as containing minimum demands, he called for...

⁹¹ Keitel, page 222

1. Full equality of the German ethnic group with the Czech ethnic group
schen people,
2. the recognition of the German ethnic group as a legal entity, 3. the
determination and recognition of the German settlement area, 4. the establishment of
German self-government in the German settlement area, insofar as it concerns the affairs of the
German ethnic group, 5. legal protective provisions for the Sudeten Germans who live
outside the enclosed German settlement areas, 6. reparations for the damages that have been
unjustly inflicted on the German ethnic group since 1918,
7. German public employees in the German territories and 8. full freedom of
confession to German ethnicity and to German-
schen worldview.⁹²

Henlein was not yet demanding the annexation of the Sudetenland to the German Reich. His demands remained within the framework of Wilson's Fourteen Points, the principle of national self-determination, and the 1918 Czechoslovak Pittsburgh Agreement, which guaranteed autonomy to the peoples within Czechoslovakia based on the Swiss cantonal model. However, in the background, and unbeknownst to Henlein, Adolf Hitler was waiting for the Czechs to eventually deliver themselves into his hands through their own mistakes.

The Czechoslovakian escalation

The Carlsbad Program had an enormous impact. Hardly had it become known than the representatives of the Slovaks, Poles, and Hungarians in the Prague parliament demanded the same autonomy for themselves. In the following two weeks, the governments in London and Paris repeatedly pressured the Czechoslovak government to negotiate with the Sudeten Germans and find a swift and peaceful solution to the nationalities problem.

Prime Minister Hoxha relents and presents the British government with a draft federal constitution in an attempt to salvage what he can. However, Henlein does not trust the Czechoslovak government to make a genuine effort and refuses to discuss Hoxha's draft constitution. Instead, he travels to London to convey the situation of the Sudeten Germans under Czech rule.

This picture looks truly bleak at the time. From May 1st to 31st, 1938,
In Czechoslovakia, 3 Sudeten Germans were killed and 130 injured, many of them seriously,
during attacks. Furthermore, 40 attacks involving the mistreatment of Sudeten German citizens
have come to light.⁹³

⁹² ODSUN documents, page 719

⁹³ Bernhardt, page 210

On May 20, 1938, Hitler further considered a military operation against Czechoslovakia. He drafted a new directive for "Case Green." His "conditions" were still such that he left it to the Czechs to dig their own grave. The directive began with the declaration:

"It is not my intention to destroy Czechoslovakia by military action without provocation in the near future, unless an unavoidable development of the political situation within Czechoslovakia makes it necessary."

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Hitler could not have known on that day that Dr. Beneš was already providing him with a pretext for the next German step at precisely the same time.

On May 20, President Beneš mobilized the Czechoslovak army, calling up 180,000 reservists, claiming as justification that Germany had also mobilized beforehand. The Czech Ministry of War added that the German Wehrmacht was already marching on Czechoslovakia with 8 to 10 divisions.⁹⁵ However, both reports were false.⁹⁶ Beneš had attempted to win over the British, Russians, and French with this maneuver, turning them against the Sudeten Germans.

The following day, newspapers in Europe and the USA reported that the Czechs' "clear no" had forced Hitler to abandon his plan to conquer Czechoslovakia. Hitler had "backed down" and his explanations regarding the Sudetenland question were "nothing but hot air."⁹⁷ The British ambassador in Berlin, Henderson, commented on this event two years later in his memoirs: *"It was primarily the jubilation of the press that gave Hitler the excuse for his worst idea of the year and that finally drove him across the line between peaceful negotiations and the use of force... The Germans had never mobilized, nor... did they at that time actually have the slightest intention of launching a coup against Czechoslovakia. ... We had prematurely cried 'The wolf is coming, the wolf is coming!' ... The press campaign against Germany had two disastrous consequences." It served Hitler as an excuse for a violent solution, it fatally encouraged the Czechs to feel secure in their situation, and it reinforced Beneš's reluctance to satisfy the Sudeten Germans.*⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Domarus, Volume 1, page

⁹⁵ 863; Henderson, page

⁹⁶ 135. The ambassadors of England and France in Berlin have their military attachés on the ground verify the news of the alleged German mobilization. The Czech report proves to be false. See Henderson, page 135 and Rassinier, page 177.

⁹⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page 103

⁹⁵ Henderson, page 140f

Hitler, who had previously taken no action against Czechoslovakia, was well aware that Beneš intended to use rumors of war to win over France and England and create difficulties for Germany. He was outraged and acted without hesitation. On May 28, a week after the mobilization of troops in Czechoslovakia, he summoned the commanders of the three branches of the Wehrmacht and other high-ranking officers, as well as the Foreign Minister and his predecessor, to the Reich Chancellery. Hitler informed the gentlemen that, in light of the Czechs' threatening gesture, he had now decided to "eliminate Czechoslovakia with lightning speed" at the first suitable opportunity.⁹⁹ During this meeting of generals on May 28, Hitler did not once mention the fate of the Sudeten Germans. On this day and in this circle, he was concerned with a different issue. His sole concern was the assessment of the strategic importance that Czechoslovakia would have in future conflicts between Germany, France, and Great Britain. Hitler speaks of the resistance that the British and French will offer to Germany's further rise to power, especially when it comes to demanding the German colonies annexed by the two powers or replacements for them in Eastern Europe. Hitler considers a military confrontation between Germany on the one hand and France and Great Britain on the other to be highly likely in this event. And Czechoslovakia, with approximately 45 divisions, is on the side of Germany's enemies, positioned behind Germany's rear. Hitler had already expressed the same idea in the aforementioned speech to the generals on November 5, 1937. Now, having mobilized on May 20 and bared its teeth at Germany without provocation, Czechoslovakia, in Hitler's view, is ripe to be removed from Germany's rear as a threat. The content of this general meeting in May 1938 makes it understandable why Hitler was still not satisfied six months later when the Sudetenland was awarded to him at the Munich Conference. For Hitler, the Sudetenland was only one part of the Czech problem. In the summer of 1938, his real concern was the threat at Germany's back door. It was Czechoslovakia.

On May 30, 1938, Hitler ordered Keitel to quietly prepare the Wehrmacht for an attack on Czechoslovakia, so that a campaign could begin as early as October 1, 1938. He also ordered the construction of the West Wall, a large-scale defensive line against France, to be accelerated. He feared that the French would not stand by and watch a German-Czech conflict unfold without invading Germany themselves.

As early as May 1938, the British government learned of German preparations for a confrontation with Czechoslovakia. This may be the reason why, on August 3rd, they sent a commission under Special Ambassador Run-

⁹⁹ BA-MA, N 28/3, page 25

Runciman was sent to Prague to ascertain the state of the Sudeten-Czech differences and, if necessary, to mediate. Runciman's negotiations achieved nothing in the interests of the Sudeten Germans, "apart from superficial pleasantries on both sides."¹⁰⁰ Lord Runciman quickly learned that a compromise between the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans was no longer possible. Until the end of August, it was primarily President Beneš who stonewalled and refused to make any concessions to the German citizens of his state. When Beneš finally relented, it was the representatives of the Sudeten Germans who now desired annexation by Germany and showed no further interest in the Czech concessions. This was the point at which Runciman cut his trip short.

He sees that there is no longer any hope for an understanding between Czechs and Sudeten Germans. Runciman's report of September 21, 1938, is devastating for the Czechs. While he places sole blame on Henlein for the final breakdown of the talks, he also writes: " *My impression is that the Czech administration in the Sudetenland,*

..."

Even though it was not actively oppressive and certainly not terrorist over the last 20 years, it nevertheless displayed such a lack of tact and understanding, and so much petty intolerance and discrimination, that the discontent of the German population inevitably had to develop into an uprising. ... The Sudeten Germans also realized that many promises had been made to them in the past by the Czechoslovak government, but that little or nothing had followed through on these promises.

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He goes on to say that Czech officials and police officers without German language skills were deployed in purely German districts, Czechs were settled in German areas, Czech companies were given preferential treatment in the awarding of state contracts, social assistance was concentrated on Czechs, and so on and so forth.

"Even now," Runciman laments, "at the time of my mission, I have found no willingness on the part of the Czech government to remedy this situation to an exhaustive degree."

Runciman concludes with the recommendation that the border districts with predominantly German populations be immediately separated from Czechoslovakia and annexed to Germany. For other areas where the Sudeten Germans do not constitute a large majority, he proposes plebiscites and autonomous status within the remaining Czechoslovakia.¹⁰²

Besides the Sudetenland question, the differences between Czechs and Slovaks are shaking Czechoslovakia, named after both peoples. The Slovaks recall the 1918 Treaty of Pittsburgh, in which representatives of both peoples agreed to a common state with equal rights for all nations.

¹⁰⁰ Henderson, page 143

¹⁰¹ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume II, Appendix II, Document IV

¹⁰² Ibid. And François-Poncet, page 370

The Czechs never honored this "marriage contract" with the Slovaks, and now the reckoning is coming. On June 5, 1938, Slovak representatives met for a congress in Bratislava and demanded equal rights with the Czechs and autonomy for the Slovaks. Prime Minister Hoxha, himself a Slovak, feared the consequences of this demand and denied the Bratislava delegates a mandate on behalf of the Slovaks. Thus, even without German involvement, the last bridge over which the two titular nations, the Czechs and Slovaks, could have found common ground was destroyed.

While Lord Runciman was attempting to mediate between Czechs and Sudeten Germans in Prague, an NSDAP party congress took place in Nuremberg from September 5th to 12th, 1938. Hitler's keynote address at the close of the event, though harsh in tone, still only demanded the right to self-determination for the German population within Czechoslovakia. He did not call for annexation to the Reich, he did not press for a plebiscite, and he issued no ultimatum. The key points of this speech regarding the neighboring country were:

"... What the Germans are demanding is the right to self-determination, which every other people also possesses. ... I demand that the oppression of the three and a half million Germans in Czechoslovakia end and be replaced by the free right of self-determination. ...

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the Czechoslovak government to engage with the appointed representatives of the Sudeten Germans and to reach an understanding one way or another." However, Hitler also issued a warning. He later ¹⁰³

stated: *"The Germans in Czechoslovakia are neither defenseless nor abandoned. This should be taken into account."*

For foreign observers, this speech also leaves the path to peace open, and even domestically, no one can yet conclude from it that Hitler's goal is actually the subjugation of Czechoslovakia in the near future. After all, Hitler had already ordered the Chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces, General Keitel, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Colonel General von Brauchitsch, a week earlier on September 3rd, to bring Wehrmacht troops so close to Czechoslovakia by September 28th that they could, if necessary, march in after two more days' march.

For months, Hitler had been observing the escalating tensions between Czechs and Slovaks, between Czechs and Sudeten Germans, and the discontent of Hungarians, Poles, and Ukrainians in Czechoslovakia. He was evidently certain that the Czechs themselves would soon provide him with the pretext for invasion. Therefore, he refrained from making any demands for annexation in his public speeches.

¹⁰³ Domarus, Volume 1, page 904

Meanwhile, unrest continued to simmer in Czechoslovakia. On September 15, Sudeten German leader Henlein, in a radio broadcast, openly demanded annexation to the German Reich. The Czechoslovak government subsequently attempted to arrest him. Henlein fled to Germany, accompanied by several thousand young Sudeten German men of military age.

England's and France's interference

In France and England, meanwhile, there was an awareness of the danger that Hitler and the Wehrmacht might do what Henlein and the Sudeten Germans were demanding. The French government, knowing from previous exploratory talks in London that the British were not prepared to march on behalf of Czech chauvinism, felt unable to fight for Czechoslovakia alone. Although the French government was aware of the reasons for the impending disintegration of Czechoslovakia, it was determined to keep the state alive as an ally at Germany's back. Thus, on the 14th, French Prime Minister Blum assured the Czech envoy in Paris of this.

In March 1938, France seriously declared that it would fulfill its military obligations to Czechoslovakia without reservation should Germany resort to arms over the Sudeten Germans.¹⁰⁴ However, the very next day the tide turned. At the conference of the Permanent Defense Committee in Paris on March 15, Prime Minister Blum and the ministers and generals present concluded that the French armed forces were too weak for a two-front war between France and Czechoslovakia against Germany, and that the West Wall was now too strong to repel a French attack. They assessed the situation as follows:

Spain and Italy might stab France in the back, Poland would attack Czechoslovakia on the German side, Belgium would not tolerate a French march through the country, the Soviet Union's ability to provide assistance was questionable, England would not commit to any concrete support, and therefore France itself could not rush to the aid of the Czechs.¹⁰⁵ Thus, France was no longer prepared to remain loyal to its alliance with Czechoslovakia, even though Blum had promised to do so the day before.

The British government under Chamberlain felt no contractual obligations to the Czechs and, moreover, was not prepared for a war against Germany. Chamberlain made no secret of this to the French. Meanwhile, the government in France was changing. When the newly appointed French Prime Minister Daladier traveled to London on April 28 and 29, 1938, to make one last attempt at war with Germany, he was met with resistance from the French government.

¹⁰⁴ Churchill's memoirs, page 335

¹⁰⁵ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, pages 169-178 and Gamelin, pages 322 ff.

When asked to persuade the British to issue a guarantee for the continued existence of Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain countered during the talks:

"Never will the English people, nor the Dominions, start a war to prevent the peoples of Central Europe from expressing their will in a plebiscite. ... If Beneš had treated the German minorities he annexed liberally, as he had pledged in 1919, the present crisis would not exist. But there is another consideration. England disarmed between 1925 and 1935. New armament programs for naval and air armament have only just begun. Only when these programs are completed can England face another war." However, the English government repeatedly informed the French and German governments that, in the event of a war in which France intervened, it would side with France.¹⁰⁷ Thus, according to the government in power in England, it is in their interest that the ¹⁰⁶

conflict between the many peoples within Czechoslovakia does not set off a chain reaction in which first the Czechs draw the French and then the French the British into a war with Germany. Only a group of opposition politicians around Winston Churchill already holds the view in England that

Great Britain must immediately conclude a "Grand Alliance" with France and the Soviet Union for war against Germany. And France continues to lull the Czechs and Slovaks into illusions. Prime Minister Daladier, against his better judgment, repeats the French troop promise made to the Czechoslovak government last March and declares on June 12, 1938:

"France's obligations to Czechoslovakia are sacred and cannot be circumvented." ¹⁰⁸

Chamberlain's first attempt at mediation and Beneš's proposal for the resettlement of the Sudeten Germans

Chamberlain realistically sees that events are now heading towards a war that would force the British, against their will, to side with the Czechs.

The Sudeten Germans are now openly demanding their annexation to the Reich.

The Wehrmacht is "ready to intervene" in the Czechs.

New clashes are escalating. The Czech government subsequently declares martial law in 13 Sudeten German districts. In this situation, Prime Minister Chamberlain tries to salvage what he can.

¹⁰⁶ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page

¹⁰⁷ 185; Henderson, page

¹⁰⁸ 132; Churchill Memoirs, page 355. The French ambassador François-Poncet dates such a promise- For the events of July 12, 1938, see François-Poncet, page 370

On the night of September 13-14, Chamberlain wrote to Hitler, offering to come to Germany immediately to work with him on a peaceful solution to the pending problems in Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain took this step without consulting his Foreign Minister or even the entire cabinet. Hitler immediately agreed and invited the British Prime Minister to Berchtesgaden the following day. He even considered flying to England himself to spare the nearly 70-year-old Chamberlain the discomfort of such a journey.

On September 15, Chamberlain and Hitler met face-to-face for the first time. At Hitler's suggestion, the meeting took place in private. Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and Wilson, Chamberlain's foreign policy advisor, were not present. Only an interpreter was there. Thus, this first conversation between the two became a struggle solely between Chamberlain and Hitler. He lamented the League of Nations' inability to resolve the minority problems of Germans abroad and demanded the right to self-determination for the Sudeten Germans as well. In the conversation, Hitler demanded nothing less and nothing more than the annexation of the border regions inhabited by a German majority to the Reich and a plebiscite for disputed districts. In his view, the plebiscite should determine whether further territories should be ceded from Czechoslovakia to Germany. The German Chancellor announced that he would soon "solve the problems of the Sudeten Germans one way or another on his own initiative." Chamberlain understood the threat posed by these words. "One way or another" meant, in Hitler's way of expressing himself: either the other side would give in or the Wehrmacht would invade Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain promised Hitler that he would immediately discuss the question of self-determination for the Sudeten Germans with his cabinet in London and then come to Germany for a second meeting as soon as possible. In return, he extracted from Hitler a promise to refrain from intervening in Czechoslovakia until then.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, French Foreign Minister Bonnet informs the British government that France will endorse all of Chamberlain's proposals to Hitler.¹¹⁰ On September 16, Chamberlain, barely back in London, gives his Cabinet a report on his trip. He leaves no doubt that Germany is poised to intervene in Czechoslovakia with troops if the Sudeten German problems are not resolved as quickly as possible on the basis of the right of self-determination. Lord Runciman, recalled from Prague, also reports to the Cabinet at the same meeting. He holds the Czech government fully responsible for the current, completely deadlocked situation in Czechoslovakia.

¹⁰⁹ Henderson, page 151

¹¹⁰ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page 265

Runciman concludes his presentation with the recommendation to annex the Sudetenland to Germany as quickly as possible without much discussion.

President Beneš, having been informed of this, now hastily tries to persuade the French government to agree to a minimal solution. On September 17, he sends Prime Minister Daladier a letter with an enclosed map, proposing the cession of three Sudetenland territories with approximately 800,000 Germans.

2.3 million Sudeten Germans would have remained part of Czechoslovakia. The Beneš letter contains the handwritten postscript: *"I implore you not to make this proposal*

public, because I would have to deny it."

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With this concession, albeit too late, and the handwritten addendum, the French and English governments believe that President Beneš no longer rejects territorial cessions in principle, and they know that he does not want to bear the responsibility for them himself, but rather leave it to the French.

The conversation Beneš has with the French ambassador, Lacroix, when he hands him the aforementioned letter to President Daladier, is revealing. Beneš not only informs the Frenchman of the contents of his letter, for example, his proposal to cede certain parts of the country and "800,000-900,000 Germans," but he also reveals that his thoughts extend beyond what the letter to Daladier suggests. He adds the following to the proposal made in the letter:

"On the other hand – assuming the cession of the territories is agreed – the government of the (German) Reich must accept taking in approximately one million Sudeten Germans who came from Czechoslovak territory on its own territory."

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In addition to this letter, which Lacroix was to deliver, Beneš sent the Czech minister Nečas to London and Paris to convince influential politicians of his offer. Nečas's task was to convey to the British and French, as a condition for territorial concessions, that the German Reich had to "take on at least 1.5 to 2 million Germans."¹¹³ The instruction to Minister Nečas also included the addendum, "Don't say that this came from me." Here, the idea underlying the later expulsion of the Sudeten Germans appears for the first time in Beneš's writings.

On September 18, Daladier and his Foreign Minister Bonnet met with Chamberlain and Halifax in London. The British and French now jointly sought a solution that would neither violate France's treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia nor lead to a war over the Sudeten Germans' hitherto denied right to self-determination. As a result of this

¹¹¹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page

¹¹² 267; Telegram from Lacroix to Foreign Minister Bonnet of September 17, 1938; See ODSUN Documents, pages

¹¹³ 766f; ODSUN Documents, page 762

Following the conference, on September 19th, both governments, the British and the French, separately sent identical demands to Prague, urging it to cede the territories with more than 50% Sudeten German population to the German Reich, voluntarily and on its own initiative, with or without a plebiscite, and to entrust the redrawing of borders to an international commission. As an incentive, the Czechs were informed of England's willingness to guarantee the new borders of their state after the cession of the Sudetenland. This was a promise from which England later skillfully evaded its obligations. This partial guarantee of September 19, 1938, will be revisited later in this book, in the section on guarantees. The letters from the British and French concluded with a request for a prompt reply, no later than September 21st. That was within 48 hours. However, Chamberlain supplemented the letter to Beneš with an instruction to the English ambassador Newton in Prague to remind President Beneš that he "absolutely must give his reply this evening, or at the latest tomorrow."¹¹⁴ This is even an ultimatum without time for consideration.

Chamberlain and Daladier's decision to enforce peace in Europe in this way met with a mixed response in England and France. Alongside the support of all those who wanted to spare Europe another war, there were "hawks" in both countries who, regardless of the desolate internal state of the multi-ethnic Czechoslovak state, preferred war with Germany to accepting an annexation solution in favor of the Sudeten Germans. In France, Ministers Mandel, Reynaud, Champetier de Ribes, Campinchi, Zay, and de Chappedelaine formed the "war party."

Mandel, Reynaud, and Champetier threatened to withdraw from the Cabinet if Daladier agreed to the annexation of the Sudetenland to Germany.¹¹⁵ Colonial Minister Mandel even went so far as to call Beneš, the President of Czechoslovakia, in Prague on September 20 and, contrary to his Prime Minister's letter, openly called upon him for war, indeed, even for the opening of war: "*Neither Paris nor London has the right to dictate your position to you. If your territory is violated, you should not hesitate for a second to*

*... give the order to your army to defend the homeland. ... If you **fire the first shot in self-defense**, the reverberation in the world will be tremendous. The cannons of France, Great Britain, and also Soviet Russia will begin firing as if of their own accord. ..."*

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In England, it is primarily Churchill, Vansittart (the government's foreign policy advisor), and Eden (the predecessor of the current foreign secretary) who prefer war to "Anschluss" (annexation). Similarly, in Germany, there are...

¹¹⁴ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume II, Document 938

¹¹⁵ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page

¹¹⁶ 275 Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page 276

ken and pigeons. The most prominent representative of the peace party in the Reich is Aviation Minister Göring, who is also Commander-in-Chief of the German Air Force.

His counterpart as a hawk in the cabinet is Reich Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop.

The multi-ethnic crisis in Czechoslovakia also affected other European states. Hungary, once ruler of Slovakia for almost a millennium, looked to the territories in southern Slovakia where nearly 750,000 Hungarians still lived. On September 22, the Hungarian government demanded that Prague treat the Hungarian minority in the same way as the German minority. Poland demanded the industrial region of Teschen, where a small Polish minority resided. Poland, which felt closely allied with Hungary, also lobbied Hitler for the annexation of Carpathian Ruthenia to Hungary, which would create a common Polish-Hungarian border.

Hitler, it should be mentioned here, used this occasion to express his first desire for something in return to the Poles. He demanded the annexation of the city of Danzig and an extraterritorial motorway connection through Pomerelia to East Prussia, which was cut off from the rest of the Reich. On September 21, the Polish government communicated its territorial demands in three notes to Prague, Paris, and London. The next state with ambitions was the Kingdom of Italy. Although not a neighbor, it was a potential partner. It wanted to play a role as the protecting power of Hungary and as a dominant power in the Danube region. "Duce" Mussolini demanded a plebiscite for all minorities in Czechoslovakia, but he urged peace and, entirely in line with Hitler's thinking, called for a war, if it proved unavoidable, to be confined to the immediate conflict zone. Mussolini stated several times in public speeches at the time that Italy would remain neutral in a war over Czechoslovakia as long as Great Britain also stayed out of it.

While the English and French governments sought a bloodless solution, "the internal situation in Czechoslovakia was developing from bad to worse."¹¹⁷ Propaganda in the German Reich painted a different picture.

black and further inflames the Sudeten Germans. Even after subtracting the falsehoods of the German media, a few summary executions and several hundred arrests of members of the German population remain. In Germany, 150 Czechs residing there are taken hostage to prevent further executions in Czechoslovakia. Sudeten leader Henlein publicly declares that the Sudeten Germans have no other choice but to take their fate into their own hands and arm themselves. He calls upon the able-bodied Germans in Czechoslovakia to form a "Sudeten German Free Corps" within the Reich and liberate their homeland themselves. Within two days, 40,000 young men gather on the German side. From there, they begin to march with disarming

¹¹⁷ Formulation by Henderson, page 151

They fought against the Czech troops stationed at the border until Hitler put a stop to it. Alarmed by the unrest in Czechoslovakia and seeking safety from war, approximately 240,000 Sudeten Germans left their homeland in September 1938 and fled to the German Reich.¹¹⁸

Roosevelt's rescue attempt

Shortly before the crisis reached its peak, on September 19, the major power behind the scenes attempted to save Czechoslovakia. For President Roosevelt, the multi-ethnic state of Czechs and Slovaks was part of the postwar order in Europe, which the US had helped to build and which the dictator Hitler could not alter without US approval. Roosevelt was also concerned with asserting his claim to leadership in Europe on behalf of the US. The Sudeten Germans' right to self-determination was of lesser importance compared to this claim. The president proposed a naval blockade against Germany to the British ambassador in Washington, Sir Lindsay. The proposal suggested that American and British naval forces would cut Germany off from its overseas imports with a continental blockade stretching from the North Sea across the Atlantic and the Mediterranean to Suez, thus forcing it to accept the status quo of the Sudeten Germans. Roosevelt was willing to violate US law to achieve this. Under international law, naval blockades are acts of war, and the US is neutral under its own domestic law. The president is prepared to lead the US into war to preserve Czechoslovakia.

The Czechs' change of heart

At noon on September 19, 1938, the British-French proposal to cede the Sudetenland to Germany was presented to the Czechoslovak president. Beneš and his cabinet retreated to Prague Castle for a 30-hour meeting. Nervousness grew in Paris and London, as the decision about peace or war now rested with the Czechs, even for the British and French. For the Czech government, however, it was not simply a matter of peace or war. For the Czechs, it was about the survival of a multi-ethnic state they controlled or its disintegration.

On September 20th at 8 pm, the Czech Foreign Minister Krofta will inform the ambassadors of England and France of the cabinet decision.

The government of Czechoslovakia refuses to cede the Sudetenland and asks the governments in Paris and London to "revise their position."¹²¹ But the declaration is obviously on very shaky ground.

¹¹⁸ Henderson, page 151;

¹¹⁹ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's War, page 129;

¹²⁰ Castle and seat of government in

¹²¹ Prague; Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume II, Document 987

Just two hours later, Prime Minister Hoxha changed course and sent the following telegram to the governments in Paris and London:

"With the agreement of the President of the Republic (Beneš), I declare the following: If I were to personally declare to Beneš tonight that, in the event of war between Germany and Czechoslovakia over the Sudeten Germans, France would not intervene in light of its agreements with England, the President of the Republic would take note of this declaration. The Prime Minister (Hodja) would then immediately convene the Cabinet, all of whose members would then be prepared to concede to the President of the Republic."

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With this, Czech President Beneš and Slovak Prime Minister Hoxha, for the second time in a week, shifted the responsibility for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from their state onto those who had forced these Germans into Czechoslovakia in 1919: the French. Shortly after this "capitulation" of the Czechoslovak leadership, the French government declared—as now suggested by the Czechs—that

France would not be helped if a German attack occurred due to the Czechoslovak government's rejection of the Anglo-French plan. A rejection of the Anglo-French plan would lead to the collapse of the Franco-Czech alliance.¹²⁴ The English

The reaction is no less clear. It reads:

"The Franco-British plan is the only means of preventing the imminent German attack. ... If, after a new assessment of the situation, the Czech government nevertheless decides to reject our proposal, it naturally remains free to take all measures it deems appropriate to manage the resulting situation. ..." So, England and France refuse to come to the aid of the Czechs in the event of a German attack.

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On September 21 at 5 p.m., Foreign Minister Krofta presented the final decision of the Czechoslovak government and President Beneš to the ambassadors of England and France. The Anglo-French plan for the cession of the territories predominantly inhabited by Sudeten Germans was accepted "with bitterness."¹²⁶ The way was now clear for further negotiations.

between Chamberlain and Hitler.

¹²² Parentheses contain author's notes. Benoist-

¹²³ Méchin, Volume 6, page 289;

¹²⁴ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page

¹²⁵ 290; Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume II, Document

¹²⁶ 991; Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume II, Document 1005

The meeting in Bad Godesberg from September 22nd to 24th, 1938

Hitler decides to meet Chamberlain halfway this time. Thus, the second meeting takes place on September 22nd in Bad Godesberg near Bonn on the Rhine. Prime Minister Chamberlain informs Hitler of the Czechoslovakian government's acceptance of the Anglo-French plan, achieved only through pressure and considerable effort. He expects Hitler's gratitude, but to his dismay, Hitler adds two new demands. The first is for equal treatment of the Hungarian and Polish minorities.

In doing so, Hitler adopted the demands of the Italian, Polish, and Hungarian governments, which they had raised since the first Hitler-Chamberlain meeting. Secondly, Hitler demanded the immediate occupation of the zones predominantly inhabited by Sudeten Germans by the Wehrmacht within just four days, and consequently the withdrawal of Czechoslovakian police and military forces from there.

What explains Hitler's haste so close to success, which now seems virtually assured? Thanks to the German wiretapping service,¹²⁷ Hitler is now informed of developments that even Chamberlain is unaware of. Firstly, in the aforementioned telephone conversation, French Minister Mandel urged President Beneš to resist the Germans. Mandel had used "the cannons of France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union" as bait. Secondly, the Prague government has openly discussed with Czech ambassadors in Paris and London, via telephone lines running through the Reich, the need to buy time until the opposition in France and England overthrows Daladier and Chamberlain and replaces them with new, war-ready leaders.¹²⁸

Hitler is aware of the cabinet crisis in Paris and is conscious of the danger that, instead of the "Peace Prime Minister" Daladier, a new prime minister from the hawks could soon take office and pursue a course of confrontation against Germany. Thus, Hitler is suddenly in a hurry.

The Godesberg Conference threatened to quickly collapse due to Hitler's additional demands. That the German Chancellor's concern was not entirely unfounded became clear even as he was negotiating with Chamberlain. On the evening of the first day of the conference, the government changed hands at Prague Castle. On the second day of the conference, at 10:30 p.m., the new Czechoslovak government announced general mobilization, calling 1.3 million soldiers to arms.

She is evidently following Minister Mandel's advice and hopes – as the Frenchman Mandel said in his suggestion – that the cannons of France, Great Britain, and Soviet Russia will now begin firing of their own accord. Chamberlain is trying to portray this mobilization to Hitler as a defensive measure.

¹²⁷ The central German wiretapping service is the so-called Research Office within the Reich Air Ministry.

¹²⁸ François-Poncet, page 375

to explain, but even the most naive person must now realize that the Czechs no longer accept the French-English plan.

Hitler assured Chamberlain that the Wehrmacht would not march as long as Anglo-German negotiations were ongoing. He also softened his demand for the surrender of the Sudetenland within four days, postponing it by a further five days to October 1, 1938.

Beneš's "Soviet Plan"

After the mobilization in Czechoslovakia, everyone expects war. In France, 600,000 reservists are called up that same night.¹²⁹ Italy is mobilizing 300,000 soldiers and massing troops on its border with France. Belgium is mobilizing. England is bringing its fleet up to wartime strength.¹³⁰ The Soviet Union had already begun three months earlier to mobilize 330,000 reservists and to move six army groups westward from Belarus and Ukraine.¹³¹ Hungary and Poland had also mobilized before Czechoslovakia.

Beneš was meanwhile developing a new plan to avert the partition of Czechoslovakia at the last minute. As early as September 19th, he had inquired in Moscow how the Soviet Union would react in the event of a German attack against Czechoslovakia. After an initial evasive answer from Moscow and a further inquiry from Prague, Beneš received the desired promise of assistance. However, the Soviets could not reach an agreement with either the Romanians or the Poles regarding permission for their troops to march through either country. King Carol II of Romania commented on the request from Moscow with the words:

"I prefer to have the Germans as enemies in the country, rather than the Russians as friends."

The Polish government reacted similarly. On September 22, Beneš—as mentioned—replaced the anti-communist Prime Minister Hoxha with General Sirovy, who was favorable to the Soviet Union, and contacted the Polish government. He offered to cede the Teschen region to Poland, in return for which Warsaw would have to allow Soviet troops to pass through. The Polish government rejected this offer, as it expected to soon acquire Teschen from German control even without this concession. The only success of Beneš's new plan was a warning from the Russians to the Poles that they would terminate the 1932 Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact if Poland participated in an attack against Czechoslovakia. Warsaw would feel the consequences of this threat in 1939.

¹²⁹ Rassinier, page 190;

¹³⁰ Henderson, page 158;

¹³¹ MGFA Military History of the USSR, Volume 2, page 127

The new Beneš Plan thus quickly failed, but it initially torpedoed the Franco-British efforts. On September 24, barely had General Sirovy taken office as the new Prime Minister when he sent the following declaration to foreign diplomats in Prague: *"Now that our mobilization has begun, further concessions from our side are no longer possible. We have passed the dangerous stage; the military situation is good. Yesterday, we expected a first attack by the German Luftwaffe, intended to prevent the concentration of our troops. It did not occur. This reticence must be interpreted in Berlin as a sign of weakness."*

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This was the state of affairs in Prague when the British ambassador presented Hitler's Godesberg Conditions to the Czechoslovak government. This time, the Czechs responded immediately. On September 25, Prague rejected Hitler's new Godesberg demands for the immediate occupation of the Sudetenland by the Wehrmacht as unacceptable.¹³³ Thus, the British efforts to avert war over the Sudetenland question had once again failed, at least initially.

In the following days, Europe teetered on the brink of a new war. The German Wehrmacht had mobilized with seven army divisions. The Czech government rejected Hitler's Godesberg demands—particularly the proposed plebiscite—and increased the army's size, including reservists, to 43 divisions.¹³⁴ The Soviet government withdrew from Czechoslovakia despite its mutual assistance pact. Poland insisted on the surrender of the Teschen industrial region. Hungary demanded the cession of the "Hungarian territories" and self-determination for the Slovaks and Ruthenians.¹³⁵ The governments in Paris and London wavered. The French called for military aid from England, and London realized that Paris itself had thus far made no military preparations to save Czechoslovakia. Despite everything, Daladier and Chamberlain left no stone unturned in their efforts to prevent Hitler from unilaterally annexing the Sudetenland. Both unequivocally threaten to wage war against Germany if German troops invade the Sudetenland.¹³⁶

The British government mobilizes its fleet and informs the Imperial government of this to reinforce the threat.¹³⁷

Hitler insists that the Czech government accept his Godesberg demands by September 28th. Otherwise – so he threatens –

¹³² Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page

¹³³ 309; Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume II, Document

¹³⁴ 1092; Görlitz,

¹³⁵ page 33; Roos, Poland and Europe,

¹³⁶ page 352; Henderson, pages

¹³⁷ 158 and 160; Churchill, Memoirs, page 395

The Wehrmacht was prepared to occupy the Sudetenland by force if necessary on October 1, 1938. However, despite the threats from both sides, Hitler wrote to Chamberlain requesting "continued good mediation services with the Czech government" and promised "that Germany would leave Czechoslovakia in peace after the handover of the Sudetenland and would not violate its independence in any way."¹³⁸

Chamberlain left no stone unturned on this day and in the days that followed to prevent a warlike conflict over the Sudetenland question. Even on the 27th...

In September, he urgently appealed to President Beneš to accept the German demands. He added that even after a victorious war, Czechoslovakia would not be restored to its previous state.¹³⁹ In other words, even after a war of victory, Czechoslovakia would have to reckon with the loss of the Sudetenland and perhaps other parts of the country.

The Munich Conference of September 29 and 30, 1938

The following day, September 28, Chamberlain informed Hitler that upon reading his letter, he had gained the impression that German demands could be met without war. He was prepared to come to Berlin and discuss the pending problems with him, a French representative, and a

to discuss with the Italian delegation.¹⁴⁰ Hitler initially does not respond to this offer. On the same day, the expiration date of the ultimatum, US President Roosevelt also sends a telegram to Hitler proposing a conference of all interested states to resolve the problems. At the same time, Roosevelt asks the Italian leader Mussolini to persuade Hitler to change his mind and mediate in the Sudetenland question. The same request is also made by Chamberlain to Mussolini. French Prime Minister Daladier also tries to resolve the crisis without war. He sends Hitler a cession plan for the Sudetenland, drawn up in France,¹⁴¹ which, while fulfilling Hitler's demands, has not been agreed upon with the Czechs. Hitler does not accept this plan either.

Now Mussolini intervenes. It enhances his prestige that the USA and England are asking him to mediate, and he sees an opportunity to earn the gratitude of the Germans, Poles, and Hungarians at the expense of the Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians. Mussolini offers Hitler mediation in the Sudetenland crisis, and the "Führer," who sees his partner in the "Duce," accepts without hesitation.

Hitler invites the heads of state and government from Rome, Paris, and London to Munich for the following day. The Prague government is informed from London.

¹³⁸ Letter of 27 September 1938, see Henderson, page 161;

¹³⁹ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume II, Document 1138;

¹⁴⁰ Henderson, page

¹⁴¹ 163; François-Poncet, page 378

But he was not invited by Hitler. The "Führer" refused to negotiate with the government that would not grant freedom to the Sudeten Germans.

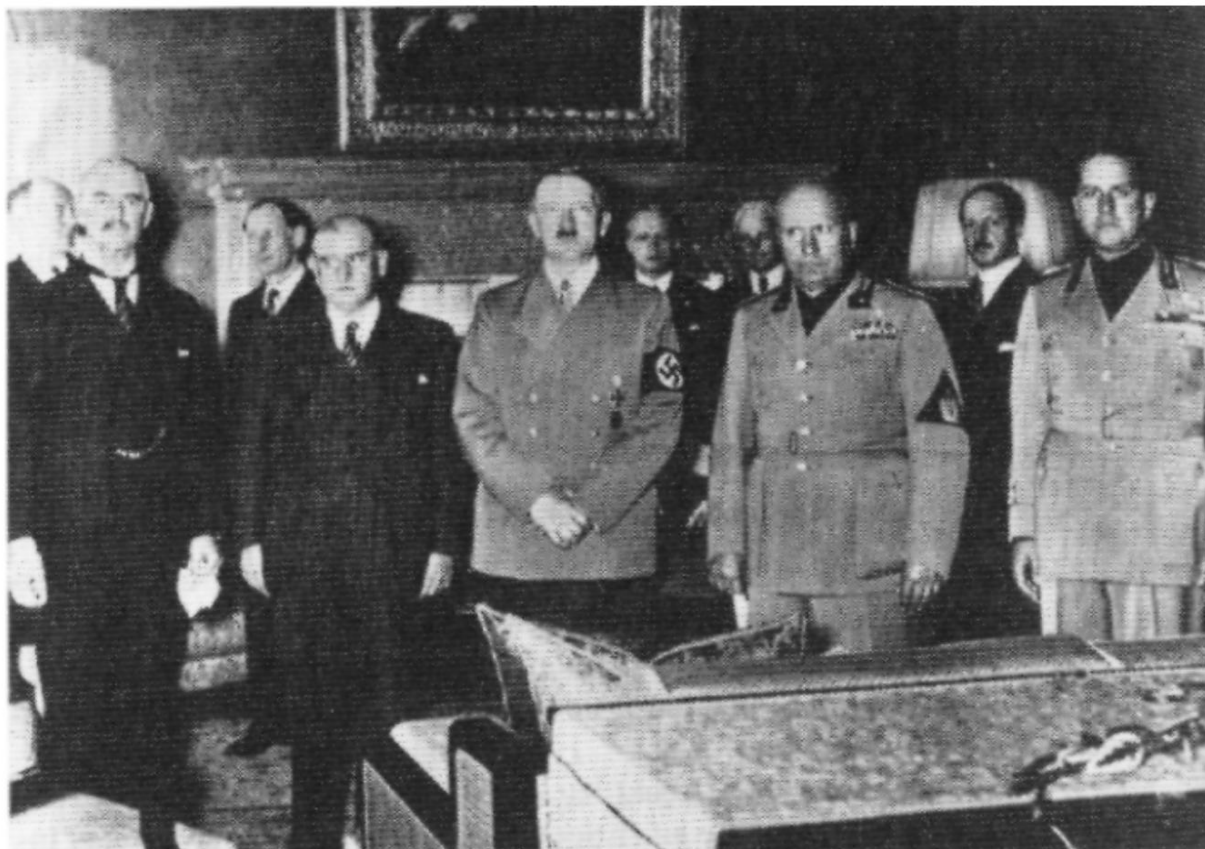


Fig. 5: The participants of the conference. From

left: British Prime Minister Chamberlain, French Prime Minister President Daladier, Adolf Hitler, Italian Head of State Mussolini and his Foreign Minister Count Ciano. In the background: Chief interpreter Dr. Schmidt, French Foreign Minister Bonnet, Reich Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, State Secretary von Weizsäcker, and the Secretary General of the French Foreign Ministry, Léger.

The conference between Mussolini, Daladier, Chamberlain, and Hitler begins with a presentation of the national positions of the four countries. Mussolini moderates the discussion. He is the only one who speaks all the native languages of the four men present. During the talks, British Prime Minister Chamberlain twice demands that Czech representatives also be admitted to the negotiations, but Hitler refuses. The same injustice as at Versailles. After some controversial back and forth, Mussolini presents a compromise proposal which—unbeknownst to either the British or the French—had been drafted the day before by Göring, Neurath, and Weizsäcker, then approved by Hitler and forwarded to Mussolini.

¹⁴² Göring is Reich Air Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, von Neurath's former successor. Foreign Minister and von Weizsäcker State Secretary in the Foreign Ministry

The three gentlemen mentioned, all proponents of a peaceful solution, not only deceived Daladier and Chamberlain. Their primary intention was to obstruct Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop within their own camp, who clearly favored a forced solution for the Sudetenland. Hours of intense negotiations ensued. But by midnight, Mussolini's "German" proposal had been essentially accepted. The treaty was signed at 1:30 a.m. on September 30, 1938. The key points of this Munich Agreement, named after the venue, were:

- The evacuation of the predominantly German-populated Sudetenland began on

October 1st and is to be completed by October 10th, 1938.

- An international committee with Czech participation will designate additional territories whose future affiliation will be determined by a plebiscite.
- An option for Czechs and Sudeten Germans within six months

ensures a voluntary population exchange. Czechs from the Sudetenland can choose to move to Czechoslovakia, and Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia can move to the Sudetenland.

- The Czechoslovak government dismisses all Sudeten Germans who have this wishing to leave the military and police service.
- No existing facilities will be destroyed during the Czech withdrawal.

disturbs.¹⁴³

This Munich Agreement between the four powers was presented to the Czechs by the ambassadors of England and France as a verdict without appeal, with the urgent recommendation that it be accepted immediately. A complete German victory. But for the mediator Mussolini, the conference was only a partial success. His attempt to also assert the interests of the Poles and Hungarians there failed due to Chamberlain's objection. The territorial demands from Budapest and Warsaw were postponed for later settlement.

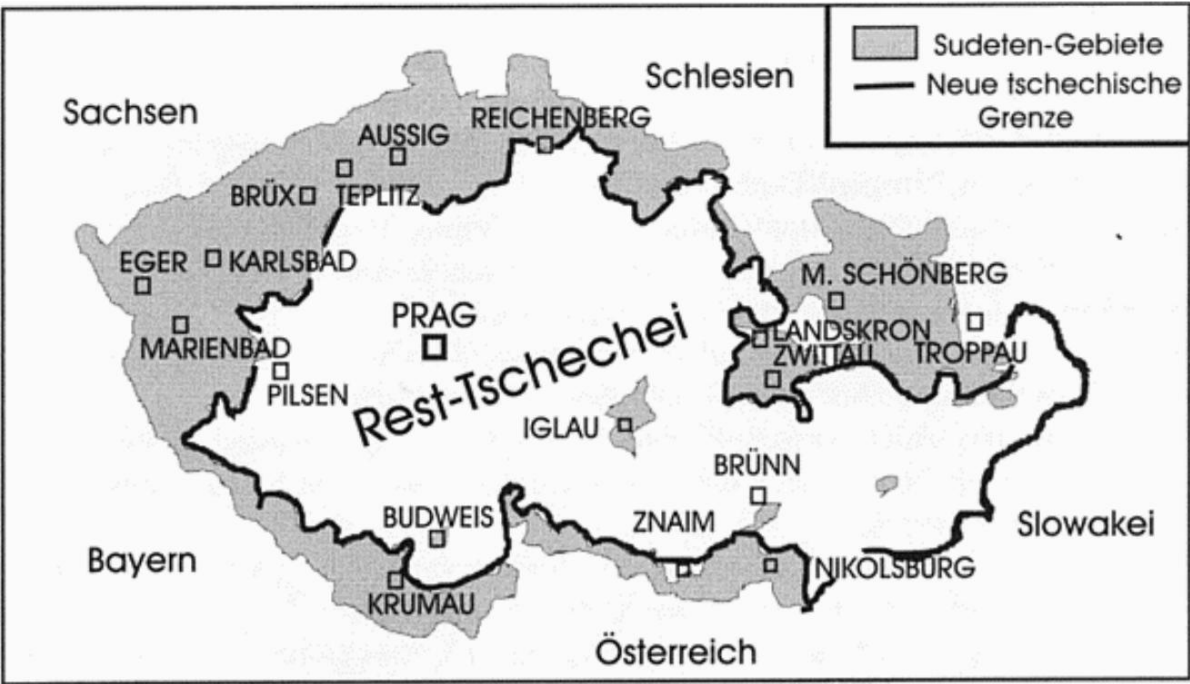
Two additional agreements to the Munich Treaty became significant later in history. One is found in the treaty's "Addendum" and concerns guarantees for "the new borders of Czechoslovakia." The second is a separate document signed solely by Chamberlain and Hitler.

First, let's consider the addendum to the treaty. Later historical accounts claim that Germany gave a guarantee for the continued existence of Czechoslovakia in Munich. However, this is stated neither in the treaty itself nor in this addendum concerning guarantees. The latter states: "*Addendum to the agreement.*"

Munich, September 29, 1938

His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government have acceded to the foregoing agreement on the basis that they stand by the offer set forth in Section 6 of the Anglo-

¹⁴³ Contract Ploetz, Part II, Volume 4, pages 154 ff



Map 12: New external borders of the remainder of Czechoslovakia from 21 October 1938

It contains French proposals of September 19 concerning an international guarantee of the new borders of the Czechoslovak state against an unprovoked attack.

Once the issue of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia has been settled, Germany and Italy will in turn give Czechoslovakia a guarantee.

- Signatures –“

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In a further additional declaration, it is agreed that a new conference of the four powers should be convened if the problem of the Polish and Hungarian minorities should not be resolved within three months.

The German Reich government did not issue any guarantees in Munich. It promised them only if "the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia is settled." It remains to be seen whether this will happen. This thread will be revisited in a later chapter after the description of the Vienna arbitration award.

The second crucial agreement from Munich is the document signed by Chamberlain and Hitler. Despite all of Mussolini's mediation successes, it remains primarily the British Prime Minister Chamberlain's achievement that spared Europe the path to another war in September 1938. His visits to Berchtesgaden and Bad Godesberg, his moderating influence on the governments in Paris and Berlin, and his pressure on Prague ultimately—

¹⁴⁴ Contract Ploetz, Part II, Volume IV, page 156

Finally, success had been achieved. In this tug-of-war over the Sudeten Germans' right to self-determination on the one hand and the status quo of Czechoslovakia on the other, in this high-stakes game of peace or war, Chamberlain developed a deep distrust of Hitler. Thus, the British Prime Minister decided to bind the German Chancellor to the future with a further declaration. After the conference, Chamberlain asked Hitler for a private, confidential meeting. He offered to place Anglo-German relations on a new foundation "with the desire never again to wage war against each other" and to resolve future disputes through British-German consultations. The offer was formulated in writing as a declaration, and Chamberlain asked Hitler to sign it with him. Hitler, still grateful for Chamberlain's cooperation the day before, signed, apparently unaware of the obligations this placed upon him. Hitler was haunted by the signature and the commitment when, six months later, he declared the rest of the disintegrating Czechoslovakia a German protectorate without England's involvement.

While the Czech government was still deliberating in Prague whether to accept its "Munich diktat," the Polish ambassador issued an ultimatum demanding the surrender of the Teschen territory within just twelve hours. In case of refusal, the Polish government threatened to declare war on Czechoslovakia. The Czechs yielded, and Teschen changed hands. This event later had serious consequences for both Poland and Germany. Warsaw's threat effectively broke the 1928 Kellogg Pact and the 1929 Litvinov Protocol, thereby also causing the dissolution of the 1932 Polish-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact—three treaties that could have protected Poland in 1939. It is significant for German-Polish relations that the Polish government initially expected to obtain Teschen at the Munich Conference with German assistance. After its self-granted surrender without German involvement, Warsaw later saw no reason to express gratitude to the Germans in the Danzig question. This, in turn, is what Hitler expects of the Poles.

The return of the Sudeten Germans is a success with a bitter aftertaste and consequences. It was only possible with German pressure and German threats, and it revealed that the politician Hitler was prepared to wage war for his goals.

Furthermore, the annexation of the Sudeten Germans angered the powers that had once forced these three million people into Czechoslovakia against their will and against the right of self-determination: the French and the Americans. In both countries, they soon became the

The conviction that the British and French had to accept a political defeat in Munich because they were militarily poorly equipped. Thus, Prime Minister Daladier – barely back in Paris – promises Parliament to energetically advance the rearmament of the French nation. And in the

Six weeks after the Munich Conference, President Roosevelt instructed the USA to launch an air armament program aimed at increasing the US Air Force to 10,000 military aircraft.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Soviet Union, which had been excluded from Munich despite being the protecting power of Czechoslovakia, was now alienated. Most significantly for the future, Great Britain had become the new protecting power of the remainder of Czechoslovakia following the Munich Conference, a circumstance that would later have repercussions. For example, the German Reich paid the price of increasing isolation in Europe and America for the return of the Sudeten Germans.

In Paris and London, the Munich Agreement was ratified in the parliaments. In Paris, it passed with a resounding majority of 535 votes to 75 against. In London, the vote was 369 in favor and 150 against.¹⁴⁶ The vote in the British House of Commons was preceded by a passionate debate that foreshadowed the direction in which Anglo-German relations were moving. Speeches ranged from expressions of understanding for the Sudeten Germans to outright hostility towards Germany, which some members of parliament considered dangerous and too powerful.

Member of Parliament Raikes:

*"We should not forget that the Czechs annexed the German territories **even before** the Treaty of Versailles. Some honorable members of this House lament the short timeframe for the handover. I would remind you that the Czechs took 20 years before they granted the Sudeten Germans any rights."* MP Sir Southby: *"We all agree that the Sudeten Germans had a cause, but that their grievances were only taken into account when Germany* ¹⁴⁷

became strong enough to stand up for them." MP Churchill: *"We have suffered a complete and utter defeat. The system of alliances with the states of Central Europe, on which France had hitherto based its security, has been destroyed, and I see no way of rebuilding it. All these countries in* ¹⁴⁸

Central Europe will, one after the other, fall under the spell of this monstrous system of political violence."

¹⁴⁵ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 15

¹⁴⁶ Rassinier, page 215

¹⁴⁷ Welles, page 133

¹⁴⁸ Welles, page 133

overwhelmed not only by the military might, but also by the economic power emanating from Berlin." Churchill also commented on the Munich ¹⁴⁹

Agreement on the radio, where on October 16 he said: *"The Czechoslovak Republic was the most democratic model*

state in Central Europe, a country where minorities were treated better than anywhere else." Southby was concerned with human rights, Churchill with competition and power. ¹⁵⁰

Chamberlain makes a grave foreign policy error during this House of Commons debate¹⁵¹ on the Munich Agreement. He links the approval of the Munich Treaty with a vote on a gigantic rearmament program, which is understandable given the lead Germany has had in its army and air force for the past two years. The program includes increasing the military budget from 400 million to 800 million pounds a year, 11,000 aircraft for the Royal Air Force by the end of 1939, strengthening the naval firepower, and the reorganization and rearmament of six active army divisions plus 13 divisions for the Territorial Army.¹⁵² This is inconsistent with the "Four Eyes Declaration" that Chamberlain and Hitler had jointly signed five days earlier, which states, among other things:

"We view the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Treaty¹⁵³ as symbolic of the desire of both our peoples never again to wage war against each other. ..."

A doubling of the defense budget and the construction of 11,000 military aircraft in just 15 months are signals that reek of anything but peace. This must have been something Hitler, who until then had never publicly expressed any further ambitions for conquest, and who, with the 1935 Naval Agreement, had unilaterally recognized and enshrined England's naval supremacy, must have realized.

Hitler's actions seemed like a breach of the peace promise made five days ago.

Accordingly, his reaction was: Four days later, in a speech he gave on the 9th.

When he holds his conference in Saarbrücken in October, he makes no secret of his fears:

"The statesmen who stand before us want – we must believe them – peace. However, they govern in countries whose internal structure makes it possible for them to be replaced at any time, to make way for others who are not so concerned with peace. And these others are already there. In England, all it takes is a change from Cham-

¹⁴⁹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page 363;

¹⁵⁰ Bernhardt, page 222;

¹⁵¹ Debate on October 5, 1938

¹⁵² Rassinier, page 214

¹⁵³ Naval Treaty of June 18, 1935, in which Germany voluntarily reduced its naval armament to 35% of the British limited

Should Mr. Duff Cooper, Mr. Eden, or Mr. Churchill come to power, we know perfectly well that their goal would be to immediately start a new world war. They make no secret of it.

They say so openly.

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Duff Cooper, the First Lord of the Admiralty, had submitted his resignation four days earlier in protest against the Munich Agreement, and Eden and Churchill had argued during the House of Commons debate on the treaty that England should have fought against Germany to secure the Sudetenland for Czechoslovakia. Thus, British-German relations were already strained once again, barely ten days after Chamberlain and Hitler had jointly signed the Anglo-German Pledge of Friendship and Consultation.

Hitler's reaction to England's new parliamentary decision and the resulting arms buildup was swift. Given England's and France's uncertain stance towards Germany, Hitler still saw Czechoslovakia, with its 45 army divisions and an air force of around 1,500 aircraft, as a threat at Germany's rear. Furthermore, Hitler considered the western part of Czechoslovakia, namely Czechoslovakia, to be historically part of the German Reich and therefore intended to annex it. Thus, Hitler's defensive thinking was intertwined with aggressive plans. Three weeks after the Munich Conference, when he issued a new directive to the Wehrmacht outlining its future tasks, he included, in addition to protecting the borders of the German Reich and taking possession of the Memel Territory, which had been annexed by Lithuania, the "disposal of the remainder of Czechoslovakia." This directive states: *"It must be possible to dismantle the remainder of Czechia at any time, should it, for example, pursue an anti-German policy."* Thus, the remainder of Czechia remains on Hitler's agenda, even though the dictator is still leaving the date and details open. He is clearly counting on the self-destructive forces within Czechoslovakia. Otherwise,

Hitler remains outwardly silent on this matter. Another country also keeps Czechoslovakia on his agenda. On October 24, the Polish ambassador, Lipski, meets with Hitler¹⁵⁵ and expresses Poland's interest in annexing Carpathian Ruthenia to Hungary. Lipski mentions on this occasion that his government has been trying for some time to persuade Hungary to conquer Carpathian Ruthenia.¹⁵⁶

The decisions made in Munich are a bitter blow for the Czechs in the territories that are now becoming part of Germany. Approximately half of the roughly 700,000 Czechs in

¹⁵⁴ Domarus, Volume 1, page 955

¹⁵⁵ Domarus, Volume 1, page 960

¹⁵⁶ ADAP, Series D, Volume V, Document 81

The Sudetenland population opted for Czechoslovakia under the right granted in Munich and resettled there. The other half – approximately 350,000 Czechs – remained in the Sudetenland without being subjected to subsequent persecution. Opting for Czechoslovakia was a difficult process for those affected, even though the majority of these people had only immigrated to the Sudetenland after 1919. Despite the granted six-month period and the right to take all their possessions with them, many Czechs left their homeland in great haste, abandoning some of their belongings. Nevertheless, it was not an expulsion. This exodus, however terrible it was for those affected, was not a precursor to the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans by the Czechs in 1945, in which approximately 272,900 people lost their lives through murder, manslaughter, and other means.¹⁵⁷

The Munich Agreement was annulled after the Second World War, and it served the Czechs and the victors as justification for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from their ancestral homeland in 1945 and the decrees of Prime Minister Beneš. The agreement was subsequently reinterpreted as the cause of the expulsions and the decrees. However, the Munich Agreement was not the primary cause of the crimes committed by the Czechs against the Sudeten Germans in 1945, but rather the consequences of the broken promises, discrimination, offenses, and crimes committed by the Czechs against "their" Germans since 1918, beginning in 1938. The heads of government of England, France, and Italy did not sign the treaty in Munich solely to avert the threat of war. They signed this agreement in September 1938 over the heads of the Czechs, partly because they knew all too well that the Czechs had appropriated the Sudeten German territories in 1918 without legal title, by force of arms. They had to acknowledge that the Czechs and Slovaks had never fully granted the Germans and Hungarians the minority rights promised in Saint-Germain and enshrined in the 1920 constitution. They knew that the two titular nations had discriminated against the Sudeten Germans as citizens of their state—personally, economically, and politically—and that they had never attempted to integrate the Germans, their second-largest population group, into their new state on an equal footing.

Regarding the consequences of the Munich Agreement, it should be added that a group of high-ranking German generals had made preparations before the Munich Conference to arrest Hitler and put him on trial should he start a war over the Sudetenland. The negotiated victory

¹⁵⁷ See Nawratil, page 89. The figures given in other literature regarding the number of Sudeten Germans who died during the expulsion vary between approximately 30,000 in Czech sources and 400,000 according to the Federal Statistical Office.

¹⁵⁸ These are Generals Adam, Beck, Count Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt, Halder, Hoepfner, Ulbricht and von Witzleben

The Munich uprising thwarted the putsch attempt and gave Hitler a reputation that prevented similar attempts from being made in the following five years. After Munich, the question remained whether Hitler intended to wage war with the Wehrmacht's advance towards Czechoslovakia or whether he was bluffing all his opponents. This uncertainty resonated a year later when, during the Wehrmacht's advance against Poland, German generals and top diplomats were uncertain until the very end whether Hitler intended to attack or was merely using a bluff to try and secure a negotiated or concessional solution to the Danzig question.

The Vienna Arbitration Award of November 2, 1938

Following the Munich Conference, the problem of the Polish and Hungarian minorities initially remained open, a problem the four powers had allowed themselves three months to solve.

On October 1st, German troops began occupying the Sudetenland, which had been awarded to Germany. On the same day, Poles marched into the Teschen region, which had not yet been assigned to them. On October 14th, a third of the German "invasion force" was withdrawn. Alongside these rapidly established facts, a fierce tug-of-war ensued over the two remaining minority issues. The Warsaw government attempted to assert its further interests in Czechoslovakia with the help of German leverage and with Hungarian, Romanian, and Slovak support. The government in Budapest, on the other hand, negotiated with the responsible government in Prague. First, the Hungarians:

At the very beginning of October 1938, two delegations from Prague and Budapest met to settle the minority rights of the Hungarians and to establish a new border. After almost two weeks, the negotiations ended without result. The Italian head of state, Mussolini, who still considered himself the patron of the Hungarians and did not want to see his influence there diminish, now urged the German Reich government to intervene. Mussolini feared that the Hungarian problem in Czechoslovakia could not be resolved otherwise within three months, and he wanted to avoid the next planned four-party conference taking place. There, England and France could exert influence to the detriment of Hungary and in favor of the Czechs and Slovaks. Berlin and Rome subsequently jointly pressured Prague and Budapest to quickly reach an agreement on the fate of the Hungarian minority and the new border. The governments in Budapest and Prague then declared on October 30th...

October, that they are prepared to recognize in advance an arbitration award that Germany and Italy will deliver on the dispute between the two states.

Mussolini's fears of England are clearly unfounded in this case. The British government shows no interest in the dispute between Hungary and the Czech Republic.

choslovakia. She herself recommends that the Italian government resolve the minority question through a German-Italian arbitration tribunal without involving the governments in London and Paris.¹⁵⁹

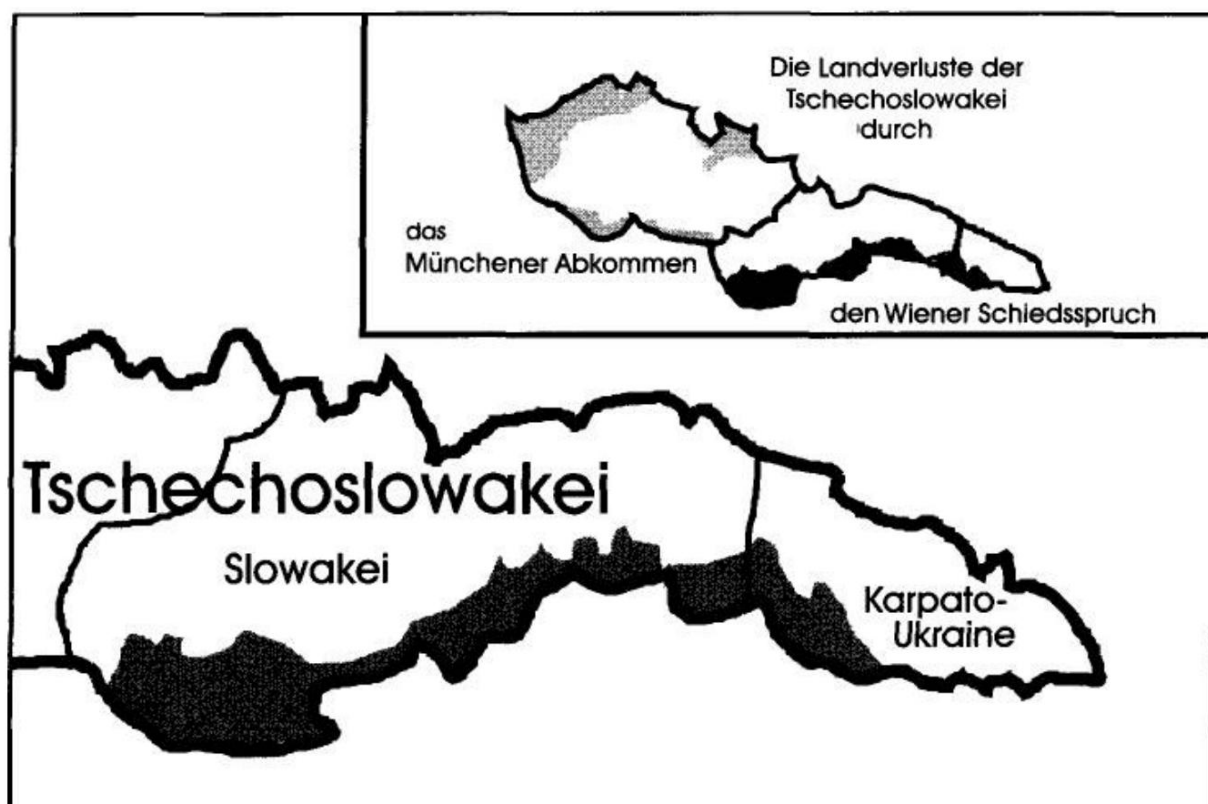


Fig. 6: Announcement of the Vienna Arbitration Award by Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop. At the table, from right to left: Hungarian Foreign Minister von Kanya, Chief Interpreter Dr. Schmidt, Legation Counselor Dr. Woermann, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, Italian Foreign Minister Count Ciano, Czech Foreign Minister Chvalkovski, and Slovak Prime Minister Dr. Tiso.

On November 2, 1938, a German-Italian arbitration commission convened in Vienna. Hungarians, Czechs, and Slovaks presented their positions, and the arbitration panel decided. A strip of territory running from west to east in southern Slovakia, including a small section in Carpathian Ruthenia, was annexed by Hungary. This brought 746,000 Hungarians back to their homeland. However, it also resulted in 75,000 Slovaks being forcibly naturalized as Hungarian citizens.

The Vienna Award only resolved one minority issue. The second, which remained open after the Munich Agreement, remains unresolved. Immediately after the annexation of the Teschen region, the Polish state made a series of ever-new demands for "Polish" territory.

¹⁵⁹ PAAA, R 29770, Sheet 760 76



Map 13: Czechoslovakia's territorial losses after the Vienna Award

However, besides a strip of borderland, this primarily concerns areas with coal deposits and chemical industries. The Polish territorial claims, which are clearly more interested in foreign mineral resources than in protecting its own minorities, are not being negotiated at the Vienna arbitration tribunal. Thus, the question of the Polish minority in Czechoslovakia remains unresolved. And therefore, the deadline stipulated in the Munich Agreement for a guarantee from Italy and Germany regarding the new borders of Czechoslovakia has still not arrived.

Now, and this deserves particular emphasis, the imminent collapse of the hitherto contractual German-Polish relations is looming. Throughout October 1938, Poland, with Germany's help, attempts to accelerate the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, to inherit Slovakia along with parts of its industry and mineral resources, and to cede Carpathian Ruthenia to Hungary. Poland's aim with the latter is to secure Hungarian support in the event of a war with Russia. For the Poles, the Czechs and Slovaks are not partners, but rather, in the event of a conflict with the Soviets, allies of the potential enemy—and behind their backs at that.

On October 24, during one of the talks that Polish Ambassador Lipski held with Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop in Berlin for this purpose, von Ribbentrop brought up a new topic. Lipski was informed by von Ribbentrop that Hitler was in ab-

Poland desired the reintegration of Danzig into the German Reich in the foreseeable future. At the time, this could certainly have been negotiated: Danzig in exchange for a piece of Czechoslovakia. However, the Vienna Award disregarded Poland's wishes. Here, an opportunity was missed to resolve the contentious issue of Danzig—which a year later triggered the war—through a "trade."

From October 24, 1938, the issue of Danzig was on the table between Berlin and Warsaw.

The "Reichskristallnacht" on November 9, 1938

In this already tense situation in Europe, a tragedy unfolds that will remain a lasting stain on Germany and have serious consequences. This event belongs to this part of pre-war history because it permanently strains Anglo-American-German relations.

Simultaneously with the persecution of German Jews, strong antisemitism also prevailed in Poland. While 170,000 German Jews left their own country between 1933 and 1938, seeking refuge from persecution abroad, 557,000 Polish Jews streamed from east to west to escape persecution in Poland by seeking refuge in Germany.¹⁶⁰ The Reich government attempted to deport thousands of these impoverished refugees back to Poland, but they had by then been stripped of their citizenship and were no longer allowed to return. An 18-year-old Jew named Grynszpan sought to draw the world's attention to the plight of his fellow Jews through a spectacular act. To this end, he shot and killed a young German diplomat, Legation Secretary vom Rath, in the German embassy in Paris and then allowed himself to be arrested. This was the second assassination of its kind, following the murder of Wilhelm Gustloff, the leader of the German exiles in Switzerland, by a Jew. The murder of Ernst vom Rath unleashed a firestorm of outrage in the German Reich. The day after Grynszpan's act, hundreds of synagogues burned across Germany. Jewish businesses were destroyed, and even homes were looted. The night of this shameful pogrom, from November 9th to 10th, 1938, was given the macabre name "Kristallnacht" (Night of Broken Glass). Shortly after this horrific event, further anti-Jewish laws were enacted in the German Reich.

The effect abroad is devastating. The suspicion of the Americans, British, and French toward Nazi Germany is further fueled. In England and America, the already existing distrust of Germany's foreign policy aims is compounded by open condemnation of the injustice perpetrated against the Jews. The consequences are not long in coming. US President Roosevelt recalls the United States ambassador from Berlin. The Reich government responds by recalling its own ambassador from Washington. Thus, the thread between Berlin and Washington is severed.

¹⁶⁰ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 39

ington cut up. What ultimately weighs more heavily is Roosevelt's effort to toughen his stance towards Germany. He proposes a new procedure to Congress, aimed at replacing the existing "cash and carry"

The system for supplying weapons of war to England and France amounts to a "lend-and-lease" system.¹⁶¹ Even though Roosevelt's proposal does not yet find a majority in Congress, the new direction is thus foreshadowed. Furthermore, he exerts pressure on Congress and industry to accelerate ongoing armament projects. With Kristallnacht, America's policy of neutrality begins its end.

One of the later consequences of this change in the USA was the hardening of positions in the dispute over Danzig in the summer of 1939. The governments in Warsaw, London, and Paris immediately learned from Roosevelt's political circle that the US president intended to end the rule of Hitler and the Nazi Party in the German Reich and, for this reason, to wage war against Germany. Thus, on November 19, 1938, just a few days after Kristallnacht, the US ambassador in Paris, William Bullitt, explained to his Polish counterpart, Count Potocki, during a visit to Washington:

"Only violence and ultimately war can put an end to Germany's insane expansion in the future."

Potocki, who reported this news to Warsaw on November 21st, stated that Bullitt had answered his question as to whether America would participate in a war against Germany:

"Undoubtedly yes, but only if England and France strike first. The mood in the United States towards Nazism and Hitlerism is so tense that there is already a similar psychosis among Americans as before America's declaration of war on Germany in 1917."

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With such a declaration behind them, the Poles and their supporting British and French had a good chance that a war over Danzig, aided by American military support, would lead to Germany's defeat. All the more reason not to give an inch on the Danzig question in 1939.

The question that arises here, despite all the terrible persecution of Jews in Germany, is why US President Roosevelt, and with him evidently the American nation, did not oppose the persecution of Jews in Poland, which they were also aware of, with the same vehemence and severity, and why they accepted the dictatorship in that country. It also begs the question why Ambassador Bullitt spoke to his Polish counterpart as early as 1938 of the "mad expansion of Germany," when this expansion had not even begun at that point. These three criteria—anti-Semitism, dictatorship, and expansion—would have been the sole concern of the United States if it were solely about...

¹⁶¹ Cash and carry: Payment upon collection; lend and lease: Loan and lease

¹⁶² AA, 1940, No. 3, Document 4

Since 1919, Germany would have inevitably been forced into conflicts with other states. However, nothing of the sort happened. The reason for the American-German differences, one can conclude from this, evidently lies in a certain hostility towards Germany among those involved.

The misconception of a "free hand in the East"

The Munich Agreement, the German-British Friendship and Consultation Agreement of September 30, the Vienna arbitration award, the "Kristallnacht" and the still unresolved French-Italian differences led to a tug-of-war in Europe in the following months, in which there were no clear fronts.

In France, there was dissatisfaction with the Munich Agreement because it was believed that an opportunity had been missed to make Germany relinquish Alsace-Lorraine once again.¹⁶³ In England, the Hitler-Chamberlain Declaration of September 30th was a document that obligated Germany in perpetuity to consult the British government first in the event of new disagreements with third-party states. England suggested to France that it conclude a similar agreement of friendship and consultation with Germany. After some negotiations, the governments in Paris and Berlin were ready to conclude the treaty in November 1938. Now, however, there was a barrage of opposition from Italy, the USA, and within France itself. The "Duce," Mussolini, claimed Nice, Corsica, Tunis, and Djibouti from the French and consequently tried to prevent the Germans from aligning themselves with France. On the other hand, it was US President Roosevelt who, at a press conference on November 15, shortly after Kristallnacht, advised all countries – including France – to stay away from Germany. In France itself, it was some trade unions and the Communist Party who, on Moscow's instructions, attempted to thwart Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop's visit to Paris and thus the signing of a Franco-German non-aggression pact.

Despite all efforts to the contrary, the two foreign ministers, von Ribbentrop and Bonnet, nevertheless signed a treaty in Paris on December 6, 1938, which stated: • that both countries had no outstanding territorial issues; • that they solemnly recognized each other's present borders; and • that they intended to consult with one another on all bilateral matters should future developments lead to international difficulties.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Germany had already relinquished Alsace-Lorraine three times: in Versailles in 1919, in Locarno-Treaty of 1925 and after the Saar plebiscite of 1935

¹⁶⁴ Contract Ploetz, Part II, Volume IV, page 160

With the Hitler-Chamberlain Friendship and Consultation Paper and the similar Ribbentrop-Bonnet Treaty, Hitler, Chamberlain, and Daladier mutually committed themselves to striving for peaceful relations and consulting one another on sensitive issues. This should have led to a moderation of German foreign policy in the period that followed, but a misunderstanding, a deception, or both, produced the exact opposite effect. Before and after the signing of the Franco-German Treaty on December 6 and 7, 1938, the German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop held talks with his French counterpart, Bonnet, on political topics of mutual interest: Italy's territorial claims against France, Germany's still-pending guarantee of the new borders of Czechoslovakia, Franco-Soviet relations, and other matters. Of particular interest was the exchange of views behind Germany's back regarding France's military agreements with the states of Eastern Europe. Von Ribbentrop describes France's treaty system as an "annoying relic of French encirclement policy."¹⁶⁵ He infers from Bonnet's replies that France expects Germany to exert a moderating influence on Italy and its territorial claims, and that in return, it is giving Germany a "free hand in Eastern Europe." Here, the German Foreign Minister has heard or inferred something that Bonnet does not later confirm. Von Ribbentrop repeatedly reports to his staff that Bonnet had hinted at this to him.

Dr. Paul **Otto** Schmidt, the chief interpreter of the Foreign Office who translated during the talks in Paris, reported to the office's press officer, Dr. Paul **Karl** Schmidt, on the return journey to Berlin about the conversation between the two ministers: *"The Eastern European issues were fought with hard-nosed tactics.*

The boss really put pressure on good old Bonnet, and he finally managed to save himself by getting into a clinch. If we rein in the Italians for the French, Paris probably won't encourage the Poles to be stubborn on the Danzig issue.

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Ribbentrop's impression, or rather his misconception, had evidently formed before the Paris Conference. On November 20, a good two weeks prior, the new French ambassador, Coulondre, took up his post in Germany. The chief interpreter, Schmidt, who was present, recorded the conversation between the new ambassador and the German Foreign Minister during his introductory visit: "Ribbentrop: *an understanding is possible if the... European states limit themselves to their real interests, thus France to its large colonial empire, England to its empire, and...*"

¹⁶⁵ Bonnet, page 135;

¹⁶⁶ Paul **Karl** Schmidt, page 29. The chief interpreter, Dr. Paul **Otto** Schmidt, conducted the quoted conversation. It was presented differently in a book published in 1952, 14 years later.

Germany is focusing on its actual sphere of interest, namely southeastern Europe.

Coulondre said that he saw the issue in the same way.

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That French Foreign Minister Bonnet and his ambassador Coulondre in Berlin viewed this view in November 1938 and wanted to give Germany a free hand in the East can also be gleaned from the memoirs of the then French ambassador to Warsaw, Noel. Noel describes how Bonnet was at that time on the verge of dissolving the French mutual assistance pacts with Poland and the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁸ This is a fairly reliable indication that France really did want to give Germany a free hand in Eastern Europe for a short period. However, as early as January 1939, during the visit of German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop to Warsaw and the attempt to resolve the Danzig question through negotiations, France intervened again.

Otherwise, promises of a "free hand" were not uncommon at the time. In the same year, 1938, for example, Italy and England concluded such an agreement.¹⁶⁹

In this agreement, England gives Italy a "free hand" in Abyssinia and towards Spain, securing in return freedom of action in Central Europe. In 1935, France and Italy had also granted each other a "free hand" in very specific areas of their interests in a secret supplementary agreement to the Treaties of Rome.

It is also possible that von Ribbentrop was not mistaken, and that France's ministers and diplomats first hinted at and then denied the "free hand." After all, they had to offer something in return for Germany's influence against Italy's territorial claims. Whether truth, misunderstanding, or error, the idea took root so firmly in von Ribbentrop's mind that he drew the wrong conclusions and subsequently gave Hitler incorrect advice. In the case of Czechoslovakia just three months later, and in the case of Poland nine months later, von Ribbentrop, based on this erroneous assessment, predicted to the "Führer" that France would tolerate Germany's wars against its neighbors in Eastern Europe. During the subsequent occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, France remained silent for entirely different reasons, thus creating the impression that von Ribbentrop had correctly understood the "assurance of a free hand" in Paris. However, with the attack on Poland, Ribbentrop's error became fully apparent. He gives Adolf Hitler bad advice, and France declares war on the German Reich of its own accord three days after the German attack on Poland.

In the case of Poland, however, Ribbentrop's advice is no longer understandable, since Bonnet had previously informed him in a letter dated July 1st that the policy of a free hand was no longer viable.

¹⁶⁷ Paul Karl Schmidt, page 32;

¹⁶⁸ Noel, pages 246 and

¹⁶⁹ 27; British-Italian agreement of 16 April 1938, see Churchill, World War, page 115

cannot refer to subjugating parts of a neighboring country by military force¹⁷⁰.

Otherwise, the months before the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the invasion of the remaining Czech territory were characterized by the English press's campaign against the Munich Agreement and Winston Churchill's tireless campaigning against the German Reich. Consequently, the German press reacted with increasing anti-British sentiment. Furthermore, in December 1938 and the following January, rumors circulated in England, their origins unknown. These rumors claimed that Germany intended to conquer Holland and Switzerland, occupy Romania's oil fields, bomb London, and other such plans.¹⁷¹ Thus, public opinion in England was already being stirred up before anyone in Germany had any reason to even consider such things. Moreover, Germany, France, England, the USA, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia continued their arms build-up in a race to the bottom.

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia

The separation of the German-speaking population from the state of Czechs and Slovaks after the Munich Conference does not solve the problem that this state has had since its founding. The Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, and Ruthenians (Ukrainians) were granted rights in the Pittsburgh Agreement of 1919 and the Saint-Germain Minority Agreement, rights which they now—like the Sudeten Germans now—finally want.

On October 4, 1938, President Beneš, who had established Czech rule in the multi-ethnic state of Czechoslovakia, resigned from his office.

He was succeeded by Prime Minister General Syrový, who briefly held both top offices. On November 29, 1938, Dr. Hacha became the fourth President of Czechoslovakia, following General Syrový. He was an administrative lawyer and, until then, had no political activity or ambitions, nor the experience required for the office. Before Dr. Hacha, as President, and Syrový, as Prime Minister, could find the time to reshape the country, the remaining ethnic groups within the state drifted apart on their own. After the secession of the Sudetenland, the annexation of the Teschen region by Poland, the Vienna Award, and the reintegration of the Hungarians into their homeland, only six and a half million Czechs, two million Slovaks, just under half a million Ruthenians, and small minorities remained in Czechoslovakia. This remnant, as agreed upon by the Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians, was to be transformed into a federal state with internal autonomy for the three ethnic groups.

¹⁷⁰ Paul **Karl** Schmidt, page 74 and ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 602

¹⁷¹ Henderson, page 183

On October 4, 1938, the Ruthenians and on the 9th, the Slovaks decided to establish their own regional parliaments, thereby shaping their own role in the new federal state. A provisional parliament and a provisional regional government were formed in Bratislava (Pressburg) for Slovakia, and a similar parliament and regional government were established in Uzhhorod for Carpathian Ruthenia. The provisional regional government for Slovakia was headed by Monsignor Dr. Tiso, and the one for Carpathian Ruthenia by another clergyman, Monsignor Dr. Voloshin. However, difficulties arose when the two presidents of the new "federal states" held the first regional elections.

In the Ruthenian elections of February 2, 1939, 92% of voters confirmed Voloshin in his office and the internal autonomy he had demanded for Carpathian Ruthenia. Three weeks later, on February 23, the election was even more decisive, with 98% in favor of Tiso and autonomy. Now, Dr. Hacha and the Czech ministers in his cabinet feared that the rest of the republic might also disintegrate. Therefore, on March 6, Hacha ordered Czech troops under General Prchal to invade Carpathian Ruthenia and, without consulting the new Ruthenian parliament, appointed the general as Minister of the Interior, Finance, and Transport. Prime Minister Voloshin was thus effectively stripped of his power as head of government in Carpathian Ruthenia, barely having been able to form his first Ruthenian cabinet.

Slovakia is not doing any better. On March 10, Hacha dismisses Monsignor Tiso as Minister for Slovak Affairs from the still joint Czechoslovak state government, along with three other Slovak ministers.

Thus, Czech rule over the Slovaks, Ruthenians, and other minorities in the unified state was restored. On March 10, Dr. Hacha also dissolved the newly elected Slovak Diet. He had Bratislava occupied by Czech troops, the Slovak militias replaced by Czech police,¹⁷² the postal and rail connections to the German Reich severed, and a few members of the state parliament known to be separatists were arrested.

Dr. Hacha crowns the disempowerment of the Slovaks by imposing a new national government on Slovakia under the former Minister of Education, Sivak.¹⁷³ But Sivak does not accept the office, and Hacha has to

After a few days of chaos, Monsignor Tiso was asked to resume government over Slovakia. From that point on, Tiso was no longer willing to seek any form of cooperation with the Czechs in general, and with the Prague government in particular, or to keep Czechoslovakia alive.

There is also unrest among the small German minority still remaining in the country. The separation of the Sudetenland not only affected 350,000 Czechs-

¹⁷² Henderson, page 201

¹⁷³ Henderson, page 201

Against their will, they were annexed to the German Reich. 175,000 Germans in the language islands within Czechoslovakia were also forced to remain in this state, which remained foreign to them. The Sudeten Germans—disappointed that they had not come "home to the Reich"—no longer cooperated with the Czechs. The Czechs, in turn, now saw the Germans as their enemy within their own country. Thousands of Sudeten Germans lost their jobs. Czechoslovakia initially denied them and their families unemployment benefits, which was otherwise standard practice in the country. Thus, for many of the Germans remaining in Czechoslovakia, economic hardship compounded their isolation. A third, albeit very small, ethnic group was therefore on bad terms with the Czechs. This rift between the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans who remained in Czechoslovakia, however, cannot serve as justification for the later imposed German protectorate over Czechoslovakia. Dr. Since taking office on November 29, 1938, Hacha, together with Foreign Minister Chvalkovsky, strove for a productive relationship with the German Reich government. Whenever complaints were directed from Berlin to Prague, Hacha and Chvalkovsky hastened to comply with German demands. Nevertheless, Dr. Hacha was unable to change the living conditions of the Sudeten Germans in his country within a short period of time.

To all the internal turmoil in the remainder of Czechoslovakia came further external pressure. The Poles persisted in their territorial demands, which they considered still outstanding. On October 17, Warsaw claimed a border area of 5 by 20 kilometers southwest of Zakopane. It then reached out to Germany and Romania, hoping, with the support of Berlin and Bucharest, to achieve the secession of Carpathian Ruthenia and its annexation by Hungary.¹⁷⁴ On October 22, Warsaw demanded four further, albeit minor, border adjustments in the Tatra Mountains. The Polish government then launched an attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to persuade Slovakia to declare its independence.¹⁷⁵ By October 30, the list of Polish demands on Czechoslovakia included, in addition to the border changes already mentioned, the area around Hrosow with its coal mines and chemical factories, an unexploited mining field near Hermanice, the Ludwigsschacht mine near Petrwald, the railway and road line from Cerny to Zwardon at the Jablonka Pass, and the road near Lubkov in the Eastern Beskids. The Slovak regional government, evidently no longer certain that the central government in Prague could protect it from the Polish territorial claims, appealed to the German Reich government on October 31, requesting protection for Slovakia against the additional Polish demands.¹⁷⁶ On October 4,

In March 1939, the Polish government began to deploy troops to the border.

¹⁷⁴ PAAA, R 29770 and Roos, Poland and Europe, page 382

¹⁷⁵ PAAA, R 29770, Sheet 76021

¹⁷⁶ PAAA, R 29770, Sheet 76088

By March 12, there were two full divisions in and around the Teschen region.¹⁷⁷ On the 13th, further troops from Poland marched to the border with Carpathian Ruthenia. Furthermore, the Polish government urged the Romanian government to seize the railway lines and Romanian villages in Carpathian Ruthenia.¹⁷⁸

Despite its territorial gains in the Vienna Award, the Hungarian government also made further demands. These were not only about the historical claims asserted by the Hungarians. They also concerned a dispute between the Hungarians and Ruthenians over the destruction of nature, which the Ruthenians were causing by deforesting the southern slopes of the forested Carpathians. The Ruthenians were attempting to obtain foreign currency through timber exports. They were exploiting the forests, which had previously stored rainfall in the drainage basin leading to the Tisza Valley, thereby causing the karstification of the Carpathians there and, consequently, the waterlogging of the arable land in the Hungarian Tisza Valley. On March 8, 1939, Hungary offered Czechoslovakia the purchase of the forest regions in Carpathian Ruthenia.¹⁷⁹ From approximately March 11, Hungary began massing troops on the borders with eastern Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia.¹⁸⁰ On March 13, reservists were called up throughout Hungary, and a Hungarian radio station announced that Hungarian troops would march on March 15 "to liberate their Ruthenian brothers." On March 14—two days before the German invasion of the remainder of Czechoslovakia—a first border skirmish took place near Munkács, in which Hungarian troops captured and occupied a village on the Czechoslovakian side.

The Romanians also have no regard for their neighbors. On March 13, Romanian Foreign Minister Gafencu informed the German ambassador in Bucharest that

"Romania has no interest in the continued existence of the Czech Republic or Slovakia, and no longer feels bound to Prague in any way."

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Hitler was aware of the ambitions of the Poles and the Hungarians, and so he decided to take advantage of the collapse of the unpopular neighboring country and preempt the other interested parties. On March 12, 1939, he instructed Colonel General Keitel that the designated army and air force units were to be ready to invade Czechoslovakia at 6:00 a.m. on March 15.¹⁸² He evidently had a keen sense of timing.

for the course of such dramas.

¹⁷⁷ PAAA, R 29934, Sheet 213499

¹⁷⁸ PAAA, R 29934, Sheet 213380

¹⁷⁹ PAAA, R 29934, Sheet 213537

¹⁸⁰ PAAA, R 29934, Sheet 213499

¹⁸¹ PAAA, R 29934, Sheet 213473

¹⁸² Keitel, page 235

External pressure accelerates internal disintegration. On March 13, Slovak Prime Minister Tiso travels to Berlin at Hitler's invitation to ascertain how the German Reich government would react should Slovakia declare independence. Hitler states that Germany has no interest in possessing the country because—unlike Czechoslovakia—it had never been part of the German Reich. However, Hitler, alluding to the Hungarian army's troop buildup, asks Tiso whether Slovakia intends to become independent or rejoin Hungary.

“ “You see,” Hitler said, “as things stand. I have no intentions regarding Slovakia. It has never belonged to Germany, and I will not deploy a single German soldier for it unless it asks me for a guarantee of its borders. Then Slovakia must also clearly state whether it wants this or not.” 183.

Tiso ended the conversation with thanks, but without a reply. He flew back to Bratislava that same day and the following day appeared before his provincial assembly, which he had convened for this purpose even before his trip to Berlin. Tiso's speech there was short and clear: *"Since the Prague government violated our autonomy*

*with the act of violence of March 10, I dissolve all ties that have hitherto existed between us. By virtue of the right of self-determination of peoples, I hereby declare the independence of Slovakia. Let those who approve of my decision rise!"*184

The reaction is unequivocal. All members of parliament rise from their seats and sing the Slovak national anthem. Immediately after this assembly, historic for Slovakia, President Tiso sends a telegram to the German Reich Air Minister Göring, writing: *"I ask you to convey the following to the Führer and Reich Chancellor: In firm confidence in you, the Führer and Reich Chancellor of the Greater German Reich, the Slovak state places itself under your protection. The Slovak state requests that you assume this protection."* 185

Tiso“

Hitler's reply followed on the same day: *"I*

acknowledge receipt of your telegram and hereby assume the protection of the Slovak state."

Adolf Hitler"

A similar request for protection from the Ruthenians, also on March 14, becomes a foreign policy disaster for Monsignor Voloshin.¹⁸⁶ Hitler does not respond to it. Instead, he has Hungary's head of state, von Horthy, inform him of the independence-

¹⁸³ ADAP, Series D, Volume IV, Document 202 and IMT Volume XXXI, Document 2802-PS

¹⁸⁴ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page 65

¹⁸⁵ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 10

¹⁸⁶ PAAA, R 29934

Inform the Carpathian Ruthenia government of its declaration of independence and the Budapest government that it has a "free hand" in Carpathian Ruthenia. On the 18th.

In March 1939, Hungary annexed this small country, which belonged to it only historically, but not ethnically, due to the Ruthenian population. Thus, on March 14th, Czechoslovakia, which had only been 20 years old, ended its existence as a multi-ethnic state.

Hitler's reaction to the Ruthenians doesn't fit well with the theory, held by many historians, that the dictator had a firm plan from the beginning of his career to conquer an eastern empire in Ukraine as so-called Lebensraum (living space) in the east. Hitler could have laid the foundation for a unified Ukraine, detached from Poland and Russia and associated with Germany, with an independent Carpathian Ruthenia under German protection. Hitler knew of the hatred of the approximately six million Ukrainians for the Poles, whose state they had been forced to belong to against their will since 1920, and he was aware of the independence aspirations of the eastern Ukrainians in the Soviet Union. Instead of ceding Carpathian Ruthenia and the Ruthenians to the Hungarians, Hitler could have accepted Monsignor Voloshin's proposal and annexed the first part of Ukraine to German territory as a protectorate. He didn't. Why? Hitler's disinterest in Carpathian Ruthenia in March 1939 can probably be interpreted as a sign that he did not yet have fully developed plans to seize control of the countries that were then masters of the two largest parts of Ukraine: Poland and the Soviet Union. By all appearances, Hitler had no intention of attacking Poland in March 1939.

On March 14, 1939, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. The death sentence for this artificial creation of Saint-Germain was not pronounced in 1939, but shortly after its founding, with the breaking of the promise made by Masaryk and Beneš to build a country of equal peoples, modeled on Switzerland. With Czechoslovakia, the first of the three multi-ethnic states created by the victorious powers of the World Wars collapsed. The Czechs, like the Poles soon after and later the Serbs, failed as leading nations of these new constructs because they acted as oppressors rather than partners to the national minorities entrusted to their care. The Americans, British, and French, as the patrons of multi-ethnic Czechoslovakia, never monitored or enforced the civil rights agreed upon in 1919 with the Czechs and Slovaks for the members of the other ethnic groups. They bear some responsibility for the disaster.

The Czech Republic becomes a protectorate

On March 13, 1939, while Slovak President Tiso was traveling to meet Hitler, the British ambassador in Berlin, Henderson, contacted State Secretary von Weizsäcker at the Foreign Office. He wanted to know what Germany's, or rather Hitler's, intentions were for the further course of events. Von Weiz-

Weizsäcker, who knew Hitler's invasion plans, evaded the question, saying only: "Whatever is done will be done in a decent manner."¹⁸⁷ Henderson, representing Great Britain's claim to have a say in the future of Czechoslovakia, warned von Weizsäcker emphatically against British intervention should the Munich Agreement be violated. This warning, as Hitler later noted, remained an empty threat. On the same day, Henderson urged his Czech counterpart to suggest to his Foreign Minister in Prague that he travel to Berlin immediately and discuss the situation in Czechoslovakia with the Reich government.¹⁸⁸

Whether under pressure from the British ambassador Henderson in Berlin or of his own volition, on March 14, the former President of Czechoslovakia, and from that day forward simply President of the Czech Republic, Dr. Hacha, became the third person to contact the German Chancellor. He requested an appointment for a visit as soon as possible, which was immediately offered. That same afternoon, Dr. Hacha, accompanied by his Foreign Minister Chvalkowsky and his daughter, traveled by train from Prague to Berlin. The elderly and ailing Hacha no longer felt up to flying. The President's failing health was also the reason his daughter accompanied him.

Dr. Hacha arrives late in the evening and is received in the Reich capital with all the ceremonial honors due to a foreign head of state. At the hotel, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop presents Hacha's daughter with a bouquet of yellow roses. A box of chocolates, a token of Hitler's appreciation for the lady, lies in the room. In a preliminary discussion that the Czech president has with the German foreign minister at the hotel, Dr. Hacha tells von Ribbentrop that he has come "to place the fate of Czechia in the hands of the Führer."¹⁹⁰ All in all, an opening to the subsequent talks that foreshadows nothing sinister. Von Ribbentrop reports Hacha's remark to Hitler about the fate of the Czechs being placed in the hands of the "Führer." The Führer instructs the minister to immediately draft a German-Czech agreement for this purpose.

When Dr. Hacha arrived at Hitler's residence, it was already 1:15 a.m.¹⁹¹; a considerable strain for the elderly and ailing president. Hacha could not have been entirely unprepared for what was about to happen. During the reception at the train station, the Czechoslovak ambassador had already informed him that German troops had just advanced into Czech territory at Moravská Ostrava¹⁹². Otherwise, the German units that had been sent to

¹⁸⁷ Henderson, page 202 and AA 1939 No. 2, document 258; Henderson,

¹⁸⁸ page 205; PAAA; R 29934,

¹⁸⁹ sheet 213455; IMT Proceedings,

¹⁹⁰ Volume X, page 291; March 15, 1939: German

¹⁹¹ troops were

¹⁹² marching here to seal off the Polish-Czechoslovakian border

The troops were scheduled to be deployed when Dr. Hacha and Hitler confronted each other, already on their march to the border. Hitler had set the entry of German troops for 6 a.m. this morning two days earlier.

President Hacha approaches Hitler with outstretched arms and opens the conversation with a torrent of compliments: *"Your Excellency, you have no idea how much I admire you. I have read all your works, and I have made it possible for me to hear almost all of your speeches."*

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Since Hacha speaks fluent German, this may well have been the case. After the opening of the conference, it is again the Czech president who immediately takes the floor. After first declaring that he will "shed no tears" for the now independent Slovaks, he turns to German-Czech relations: *"For centuries, our peoples have lived side by side, and the Czechs have never fared as well as when they lived in harmony with the Germans. That is why I have requested a meeting with you, because I want to clear up the misunderstandings that may have arisen between our two countries. I place the fate of my people in your hands with the conviction that I could not place it in any better hands."*¹⁹⁴

Hitler initially responded amicably, but then began to enumerate how the old Czechoslovakia had ruined German-Czech relations. During the reoccupation of the German Rhineland in 1936, the Prague government had offered Paris its army to stab Germany in the back in the event of a Franco-German war. At League of Nations negotiations in Geneva, the Czechs had consistently displayed an anti-German stance. In May 1938, his country had mobilized against the German Reich without any provocation from Germany. It was then that he, Hitler, had decided to draw consequences from Czechoslovakia's hostile attitude.¹⁹⁵ Even after the Munich Conference six months earlier and the annexation of the Sudetenland, nothing had changed in the old spirit of enmity. The Czech army was only seeking revenge.

"That's how the dice fell for me last Sunday," said Hitler. ... I have given the Wehrmacht the order to invade the remainder of Czechoslovakia and incorporate it into the German Reich.... Now there are only two possibilities: either the Czech army offers no resistance to the advance of the German troops. In that case, your people still have good prospects for the future. I will give them an Au-

It was set up to block the path of the Polish troops, who were supposed to march towards the Hungarian troops through Slovakia.

¹⁹³ IMT Volume XXXI, page 139 ff.

¹⁹⁴ IMT Volume XXXI, page 139 ff. On

¹⁹⁵ May 30, 1938, Hitler gave the Chief of the OKW the order to deploy the Wehrmacht against to prepare Czechoslovakia "in order to dismantle Czechoslovakia in the foreseeable future".

"They will grant a level of control far exceeding anything Austria could have dreamed of during its time. Or their troops will resist. In that case, they will be destroyed with all the means at my disposal."

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Negotiations between Hitler and Hacha never took place. The Führer urged the Czech president to immediately telephone his Defense Minister, Syrový, in Prague and order him to urge his troops and the population not to resist. The Luftwaffe's Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Göring, who was present, pressed the issue, threatening to bomb Prague the following morning if Hacha refused. Reluctantly, Dr. Hacha yielded to the blackmail and, as demanded, instructed Syrový to suppress all resistance from the Czech army. With this clear, a ban on firing was also issued on the German side for Wehrmacht units scheduled to cross the border after 6:00 a.m.

Wild versions of this late-night meeting circulate throughout historical accounts. A fainting spell suffered by the elderly Dr. Hacha and the assistance of Hitler's personal physician, who was present, certainly provide fodder for such tales. However, the two chroniclers of that evening, the German Legation Counselor Hewel and the chief interpreter Schmidt, report nothing of the sort. Schmidt later writes about the encounter: *"Nevertheless, the turbulent scenes between Hitler and Hacha, which the foreign press reported on at the time and later, did not occur that night."*

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Hewel's account of the evening also portrays Dr. Hacha as rather compliant than agitated. The account states that Dr. Hacha introduced himself to Hitler as a former Viennese administrative lawyer for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who was already...

*"I asked the question of whether there was even a chance for Czechoslovakia
"Happiness is being an independent state."*

When Hitler informs Dr. Hacha that German troops will be marching into his country in a few hours, Hacha merely asks that his people be spared a "soul purchase like during the Austrian era," meaning that the Czechs should retain their own nationality. Hitler agrees to this.¹⁹⁸

At 3:55 a.m., Hitler and Dr. Hacha proceeded to sign the declaration, which Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop had drafted at Hitler's behest after his first conversation with Hacha the previous evening:

"... Both sides have expressed the unanimous conviction that the goal of all efforts must be to secure peace, order and tranquility in this part of Central Europe."

¹⁹⁶ IMT Volume XXXI, page 139 ff.

¹⁹⁷ Schmidt, Paul Otto, page 429 f

¹⁹⁸ ADAP, Series D, Volume IV, Document 228

The Czechoslovak President declared that, in order to serve this goal and to achieve a final pacification, he entrusted the fate of the Czech people and country to the Führer of the German Reich. The Führer accepted this declaration and expressed his resolve to take the Czech people under his protection and guarantee them an autonomous development of their national life in accordance with their unique character.

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The implementation of this coerced agreement proceeded surprisingly smoothly in Czechoslovakia. The Wehrmacht occupied Bohemia and Moravia until evening. On the same day, Hitler appeared at Prague Castle and had Dr. Hacha introduce him to the members of the Czech government and the top officials of the administration. Hacha remained head of government until 1945. The former German Foreign Minister, von Neurath, was appointed "Reich Protector" and Hitler's personal representative. Von Neurath received the powers that, until 20 years earlier, had been held by the governors of the Habsburg crown in the subject territories. The German Reich government assumed control of foreign policy, finance, the economy, and defense. Hacha's Czech government, with its authority over the interior, culture, and other ministries, then only had the power to maintain a degree of internal autonomy. The police force, therefore, remained Czech. However, the German Gestapo²⁰⁰ simultaneously established its own control and power regime in the country. The military was reduced from 150,000 men to 7,000²⁰¹.

The Czechs were no longer drafted into military service, so they later emerged unscathed from the Second World War in this respect. On Hitler's orders, the discharged Czech officers received pensions, which at least made their moral defeat materially bearable. Vast quantities of military equipment and a high-performing arms industry were now also available for the further expansion of the German Wehrmacht.

Despite the dismissal of nearly 100,000 Czech soldiers, unemployment in the country subsequently fell.²⁰² The economy experienced a boost from the annexation to the Reich. This was due to German demand for the high-quality goods produced by the Czechs. The crown remained the national currency alongside the Reichsmark. Czechia became part of the German customs territory, but the external borders remained. German citizens continued to travel to this part of the Reich, now officially called the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" in Germany, only with a passport.

¹⁹⁹ ADAP, Series D, Volume IV, Document

²⁰⁰ 229; Secret State

²⁰¹ Police Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 81; the Czech historian Miksche speaks of 16,000

²⁰² soldiers. The difference between 150,000 former soldiers and the 100,000 who were only discharged is explained by the Slovak and Ruthenian soldiers who can no longer be provided with jobs in the Czech Republic.

This account—it should be added here—must not obscure the fact that the protectorate power, Germany, controlled Czechoslovakia until 1945 with a contingent of 5,000 German police officers, thereby nipping all anti-German movements in the bud. An estimated 36,000 to 55,000 Czechs fell victim to German rule during those six years, and—this too is part of German-Czech relations—more than 90 percent of the denunciations and reports leading to the arrest of Czechs originated from Czechs themselves.²⁰³

On the day of the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Hungarians also occupied Carpathian Ruthenia, a part of the disintegrating Czechoslovakia. Unlike the Czechs under the Germans, the Ruthenians offered military resistance to the Hungarians. Here, unlike in the case of the Protectorate, there was no treaty or consent from the Ruthenians, not even one obtained under duress. And Carpathian Ruthenia, unlike Czechoslovakia within the Reich, did not subsequently receive autonomous status. Nevertheless, France, Great Britain, the USA, and the Soviet Union did not react to the annexation of Hungary. The protest of these four states was directed solely against the actions of the German Reich government.

The guarantee that never existed

With the occupation of the rest of Czechia, the "Führer" Hitler committed a crime against the Czechs, which will be assessed in the following paragraph. First, a look at one specific aspect:

The French have described the occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia from the outset as a breach of the Munich Agreement. Historical accounts have adopted this view. To this day, German secondary school students are taught this. In the school history textbook "Unsere Geschichte" (Our History), Volume 4 by Diesterweg, for example, the text states regarding the occupation of Czechoslovakia: "He (Hitler) had... broken the treaty solemnly signed in Munich."²⁰⁴ The further accusation that has found its way into historical accounts is that Hitler also violated the guarantee given in Munich for the new borders of Czechoslovakia with the occupation. Anyone who reads the treaty and the addendum to that guarantee quickly realizes that this is not true.

The Munich Agreement, in its eight articles, regulates only, and truly only, the "Conditions and modalities" of the cession of the Sudeten German territories, namely: dates and zones for the phased German occupation, a plebiscite, the formation of an international committee for the final determination of the borders, the right of option for the affected territories-

²⁰³ FAZ, August 30, 1997, from the book "Hyeny" by Jaroslav Pospíšil,

²⁰⁴ Diesterweg 1988, page 123

Residents and the dismissal of Sudeten Germans from the police and military service of Czechoslovakia. Germany did not violate these eight articles – all in Germany's favor – with its illegal occupation of Czechoslovakia; therefore, Germany did not break the agreement.

Germany did not violate any guarantee because it had not issued one. The "Addendum to the Munich Agreement" guaranteeing the new borders stipulated, as already described, the prior settlement of the Hungarian and Polish minority questions. However, the Polish question remained unresolved until the day of the German invasion. Consequently, the Reich government did not issue such a guarantee.

The usefulness of a guarantee for Czechoslovakia's new borders was already controversial around the turn of the year 1938/39. None of the nations that had signed the Munich Agreement were willing to stand by their pledge of guarantee and actually provide a guarantee of the inviolability of the new borders. Each initially passed the buck to the others. After the Vienna Award in November 1938, the government in Paris called on the government in London to join it in guaranteeing the new borders of Czechoslovakia, reduced in size by the loss of Hungarian territories, as final. On November 14, British Prime Minister Chamberlain rejected the French proposal. Subsequently, the French government also distanced itself from such a guarantee. From January 11 to 14, 1939, Chamberlain was in Rome to discuss the crises in Europe with his counterpart, Mussolini.

Chamberlain and Mussolini agree that the situation in Czechoslovakia is currently too unstable to practically implement the English and Italian guarantees announced in Munich.²⁰⁶

Despite its own reservations, the British government sent a note to Berlin on February 8, 1939, inquiring whether the German Reich government would finally issue the promised guarantee for the new borders of Czechoslovakia. However, the situation remained unchanged in February. The Polish minority question remained unresolved, and thus the time for guarantees from Berlin and Rome had still not arrived. On February 28, two weeks before the German-Hungarian invasion, the Reich government responded to the British inquiry of February 8 regarding the outstanding guarantee. In its reply, the Reich government cautioned that international guarantees at this time might encourage the Czechoslovak government to once again resolve its internal problems with a harsher hand.²⁰⁷ The next two weeks proved this assumption to be correct. On February 6,

In March, General Prchala marched with Czech soldiers into the Carpathian Mountains.

²⁰⁵ Nicoll, page 129;

²⁰⁶ Nicoll, page 126 and Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume III, Document 500 (3)

²⁰⁷ PAAA, R 29934, Sheet 213567

Ukraine and "replaces" a few ministers there, and on March 10, the Prague central government dissolves the newly elected Slovak parliament. The aforementioned note from the German Reich government ends with the

sentence: "The German Reich government therefore believes that it is necessary to first await a clarification of the internal developments in Czechoslovakia and the resulting improvements in the country's relations with the surrounding states before the time comes for a further statement."

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The Reich government thus provisionally rejects a German guarantee for the continued existence and borders of the disintegrating Czechoslovakia. In reality, none of the four governments represented in Munich actually gave a guarantee. The French and the British may have intended to, but never did. On September 19, 1938, in their memorable demand to the Prague government to cede the Sudetenland, they had only **"declared their readiness** to join an international guarantee." In that "supplement to the Munich Agreement" concerning the guarantee, they then reaffirmed their commitment to "their offer of September 19, 1938." Thus, they never expressed more in writing or by contract than their willingness to provide such a guarantee. For this reason, on the day of the German invasion of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain, speaking before the House of Commons in London, referred to Czechoslovakia as a state whose borders England "intended to guarantee." None of the four Munich powers ever guaranteed the new borders of Czechoslovakia, not even Germany.

The cause of the Second World War

With the annexation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia and its transformation into the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia," Hitler achieved another bloodless victory and territorial gain. However, this was the first time a gain had been achieved outside the hitherto generally accepted justification of bringing German population groups "home to the Reich." Hitler attempted to lend the annexation a semblance of legitimacy with the Protectorate Treaty signed by Dr. Hacha. While the treaty is legally binding under international law, it lacks moral force, just as the previously coerced Treaty of Versailles had been.

Despite the collapse of the Czechoslovak state structure, the annexations of the remainder of Czechia and Carpathian Ruthenia are a crime against the right of Czechs and Ruthenians to live according to their own self-determination in their own separate states. The protectorate over Czechia is and remains an injustice, despite the coerced Hacha signature on the Protectorate Treaty, even if the Munich Agreement was not thereby violated, and even if the British, Germans, Italians, and French never...

²⁰⁸ PAAA, R 29934, Sheet 213568

They had issued a guarantee for Czechoslovakia. This remains the case even though Great Britain did the same to Egypt at the same time, and even though France may have granted Germany a "free hand in the East." This injustice would have been grounds for England, France, the USA, and the Soviet Union in the spring of 1939 to declare war on Germany and Hungary to liberate the Czechs and Ruthenians. But this did not happen.

Furthermore, with the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Hitler breaks his often-given word. Prior to this, he had solemnly and publicly declared on several occasions: "I don't want any Czechs at all" or "Germany will leave Czechoslovakia in peace after the handover of the Sudetenland," and similar sentiments. After the Munich Conference, he had given Chamberlain his word that he would refrain from unilateral actions on such issues in the future.

He had promised the British Prime Minister in writing: *"to also address other issues affecting our two countries using the method of consultation and to eliminate any causes of disagreement."*

Finally, in the Franco-German treaty of December 6, 1938, he also promised the French that *"in the future, all bilateral issues will be discussed amongst themselves if the future development of these issues should lead to international difficulties."*

Even before the self-dissolution of the ailing Czechoslovakia, Hitler, von Ribbentrop, and his State Secretary von Weizsäcker informed Paris and London that the Reich government desired no further interference from them in the still-possible changes in Central and Eastern Europe; this despite the two consultation agreements with Great Britain and France. Paris and London, however, interpreted these agreements as granting them a say in all future matters concerning Czechoslovakia. Hitler, however, interpreted the texts literally and maintained that the Slovaks' request for a German protectorate had been an exclusively German-Slovak matter and the annexation of Carpathian Ruthenia an exclusively Hungarian one. To justify the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Hitler later argued that this remnant entity had brought instability to the region.

But this reason is a pretext. His true motives must be suspected to be the following:

Firstly, Hitler, who grew up in Habsburg circles, clearly did not perceive the Czechs and Czechia as entirely independent. For him, they had been part of the German Reich for roughly a thousand years – except for the last 20 – and were only separated by some malicious act of Versailles. Hitler thought and acted on this issue in a way that was quite common at the time. The Czechs and the Poles, for example, used precisely the same arguments in 1918.

The treaties of Saint-Germain and Versailles stipulated that a number of territories were annexed to their new states based on historical affiliations, even though the "annexed" populations were neither Czechs nor Poles and clearly did not wish to become so. Hitler expressed this thinking six weeks after the annexation in a Reichstag speech, emphasizing that the Greater German Reich, including Czechoslovakia, consisted only of territories that had belonged to it since ancient times.

Secondly, Hitler obviously harbors a feeling of revenge towards the Czechs. He never forgot how they, as the "leading nation," treated the Sudeten Germans in their own country. Generosity, forgiveness, and forgetting were not among Hitler's characteristics or habits.

The third reason is directly related to the security of the Reich. Hitler is aware of the danger that Czechoslovakia has posed to Germany. He has not forgotten the talks between the Czechs and French in 1936, in which Prague offered Paris military aid against Germany's "back." He is aware of the briefing visits by Soviet air force officers to airfields in Czechoslovakia. And he also repeatedly quotes the French Air Minister Cot, who had stated in an interview the previous year...

"that joint attacks by the French and Czech air forces could very quickly destroy all German production facilities."²⁰⁹

Cot is also the originator of the slogan about Czechoslovakia as an aircraft carrier against Germany. Hitler wanted to eliminate the threat at Germany's rear for all time. To achieve this, however, it was sufficient for him to make Czechoslovakia a protectorate and reduce its army to 7,000 soldiers.

The fourth and probably strongest motive is closely linked to the last. Hitler believed, almost obsessively, that a new conflict between Germany and Italy on the one hand and the colonial powers Great Britain and France on the other would erupt sometime in the next few years. Hitler's thoughts on this matter, which he first revealed on November 5, 1937, and again on May 28, 1938, in speeches to the Reich Foreign Minister and the top generals of the Wehrmacht, revolved essentially around ensuring food security for Germany's growing population in the coming decades. In both speeches, Hitler called for the return of the colonies annexed by England and France in 1918 or replacements for them in Eastern Europe. He considered a new war with the aforementioned victorious powers of the World Wars highly probable as a consequence and therefore feared the militarily powerful Czechoslovakia as a potential enemy on the opposing side.

²⁰⁹ Interview from July 14, 1938 in NEWS CHRONICLE

Hitler argued in a very similar way, albeit in the opposite direction, in a conversation on May 21, 1938, when he tasked Colonel General Keitel with investigating the possibilities of a war against Czechoslovakia.

He speaks of the "untenable situation... if a confrontation with Bolshevism ever occurs," and in this context refers to Czechoslovakia as a "springboard for the Red Army and a landing strip for its air force."²¹⁰ Whether Hitler's fears relate to Great Britain and France in the west or to the Soviet Union in the east, for him Czechoslovakia, with its 45 army divisions and a respectable air force, is always a potential enemy just a 40-minute flight from Berlin. Thus, Czechoslovakia becomes the first loser of a major war that has not yet even begun.

A fifth point should not be forgotten. While it did not persuade Hitler to annex the remainder of Czechoslovakia, it certainly facilitated his decision. This was his misjudgment of the British and French. Ribbentrop's interpretation of the Paris talks of December 6 and 7, 1938, and the misconception that the French had promised Germany a "free hand in Eastern Europe" if this, in turn, curbed the Italians in their territorial demands, evidently relieved Hitler of all caution. Added to this were a series of German-British ambassadorial talks in which the German side gained the impression that the British government recognized "a German interest in the Czech lands."²¹¹

The politician Hitler, by taking Dr. Hacha and his remaining territory by surprise, tactically and in the short term exploited the opportunity presented to him almost automatically by the disintegration of Czechoslovakia. However, with this cheap success, he simultaneously missed the other, more strategic and long-term opportunity that the plight of the Czechs and Hacha's willingness to compromise would likely have offered him. Hitler could almost certainly have achieved an "ideal annexation" on that night of March 14-15, 1939, complete with a peace and friendship treaty, economic and customs union, disarmament of the Czech army, and a promise to align Czech foreign policy with that of the German Reich. But Hitler squandered the opportunity presented to him.

The "Führer" commits a crime against the Czechs' right to self-determination, breaking his oft-repeated promise not to touch Czechia. With this breach of his word, Hitler squanders the credit he still enjoys in France, England, and the USA. What is far worse for Germany is that Hitler's subjugation of Bohemia and Moravia leads the governments of the three aforementioned countries to consider waging another war against Germany at the next suitable opportunity. The annexation of

²¹⁰ Keitel, page 222

²¹¹ AA 1939 No. 2, document 258

The remainder of Czechia is the reason for this; the Danzig question then gives the British and French the necessary opportunity.

The foreign reactions to the invasion of the remainder of Czechoslovakia by Wehrmacht forces were disastrous for the German Reich. England initially abandoned the Czechs, but then erupted in outrage against Germany. On March 15, the day of Czechoslovakia's collapse, the day Dr. Hacha visited Hitler, the British government first withdrew its Munich Security Treaty from Czechoslovakia. That afternoon, Prime Minister Chamberlain announced before the House of Commons in London:

"In our view, the situation has fundamentally changed since the Slovak Parliament declared Slovakia's independence. This declaration had the effect of causing the state, whose borders we intended to guarantee, to disintegrate from within and thus come to an end. Accordingly, the situation... which we had always considered only temporary, has ceased to exist. His Majesty's Government can no longer..."

Consequently, they no longer felt bound by this obligation." With this, the British government constructed an argument for its own benefit, one which it refused to accept in Germany. When the German Reich government also argued that Czechoslovakia, with its new borders established at the Munich Conference, had ceased to exist on March 14, 1939, and that the invasion of the remaining Czech territory by German troops could therefore not be a violation of the spirit or the letter of the Munich Agreement, the British government suddenly saw things differently.²¹³ From then on, it accused the Reich government of violating the Munich Agreement.

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The morning after Chamberlain's declaration rescinding the promise of protection, news of Hitler's Hacha Protectorate Treaty and the German invasion of the remainder of Czechoslovakia reached London. Outrage over both events was so immense in Parliament and the press that Prime Minister Chamberlain immediately sided with Czechoslovakia once again. The following day, March 17, he delivered a second speech in Birmingham, effectively ending his previous policy of rapprochement with the German Reich. To put his previous policy in a more favorable light, he began his new speech with a description of the old Czechoslovakia before the cession of the Sudetenland. He referred to it as

"A problem that has existed since the Treaty of Versailles, and which could have been solved long ago if only the statesmen of the last 20 years had had a more comprehensive and enlightened understanding of their duty. It was like a long-neglected disease resurfacing."

²¹² Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page

²¹³ 82 AA 1939 No. 2, page VIII

*The only option left was surgery to save the patient.
save".* ²¹⁴

After this retrospective, Chamberlain shifts the subject to the "proud and brave Czech people," without mentioning that it was precisely these "proud and brave" Czechs who had perpetrated the "neglected evil" he had just lamented. Chamberlain rightly criticizes Hitler, who had recently proclaimed "he didn't want any Czechs," for having annexed them to the German Reich. Then, the British Prime Minister—rhetorically masterful—draws a parallel between German actions in the Rhineland in 1936, in Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938, the annexation of Czechoslovakia in 1939, and an uncertain future, asking whether Germany would then attempt to dominate the globe. With this turn in his speech, Chamberlain accuses the hitherto accepted policy of "reunification" of being, quite obviously, merely the long run-up to German world domination. From this point on, it should be noted, the politics and propaganda of all countries that would later become Germany's enemies again made use of this memorable formula, which had already been used in the First World War. The specter of German world domination began to haunt the nation even before Hitler considered waging war against neighboring Poland over Danzig.

Returning to Chamberlain's speech in Birmingham, the English Prime Minister rightly accuses Hitler of violating the right of self-determination in Czechoslovakia, a right Hitler himself had always invoked. Chamberlain concludes his speech with a warning against mistaking England's yearning for peace for a lack of strength on the part of the British. Great Britain, he says, is prepared to accept a war "as a challenge to the exhaustion of its strength."²¹⁵

With the occupation of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, and Chamberlain's speech on the 17th, England and the German Reich were once again on a collision course. While Chamberlain was objectively correct in his accusations of breach of trust and violation of the Czechs' right to self-determination, mentioning England's yearning for peace in this context was pure hypocrisy. The British protectorate over Egypt and Sudan, sovereign states since 1922, was, for example, no different from the German protectorate over Czechoslovakia. In 1924, the Egyptian government unsuccessfully petitioned the British to withdraw their troops. In 1925, England forced the separation of Egypt and Sudan. In 1926, the British blocked the re-election of Egypt's Prime Minister Saghlul Pasha, and in 1928, they again removed the Prime Minister – this time Nahas Pasha – from office. In 1936, England finally imposed a protectorate on Egypt due to an alleged threat from Italy, including troop deployments and berths for the ships.

²¹⁴ British War Bluebook, Document 9

²¹⁵ British War Bluebook, Document 9

The English navy and the right to defend English interests on Egyptian territory. With this still relatively new forced protectorate over sovereign Egypt in 1939, England was hardly the moral authority that could presume to judge Germany in the case of Czechoslovakia. Yet the English government, which seemed untroubled by France's breaches of peace against Germany in 1923 and 1925, by Poland's four conquests of its neighbors in 1920, 1921, and 1938, by the Memel annexation of Lithuania in 1923, and by Hungary's recent annexation of Carpathian Ruthenia, reacted with extreme sensitivity towards Germany in the case of the Czechoslovak occupation.

The real issue here is not just Hitler's broken promises, nor just the Czechs' right to self-determination. It's about the balance of power on the continent and a still-dormant Anglo-German problem: the former German colonies.

This will be discussed later in this book.

The German Reich, with the protectorate of Czechoslovakia, had become a bit too powerful. This contradicted the centuries-old principle of English foreign policy not to tolerate any hegemony on the continent. The English opposition leader, Churchill, had already expressed this explicitly a year earlier during the visit of Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, when he told the guest from Germany: *"If Germany becomes too powerful, we will destroy it again."*²¹⁶ Hitler's ruthless actions towards Czechoslovakia had unleashed forces that Germany—as the following years would show—was not equipped to handle.

England would have had grounds to wage war against Germany here, both to protect the Czechs and as punishment for broken promises. However, despite its overwhelming naval superiority, even combined with France's land and air power, despite the 30 Soviet divisions offered to it, and despite the army divisions that the Czechs themselves could provide to defend their country, the London government did not yet feel sufficiently prepared for armed conflict. Thus, it declared to the Czechs that the Munich peace treaty was no longer valid and let the opportunity pass unused. The obligation to maintain peace was thus reinstated.

If there were no such obligation to maintain peace after the expiration of the causes and justifications for war, then the German Reich, too, would have had the right, at any time after the imposed Treaty of Versailles, to initiate new wars on its own initiative, should a favorable opportunity arise, to redress the injustice suffered. The fact that England, just like France, is now, after allowing this pretext for war to pass, setting the course for a German-Polish conflict over Danzig in secret Anglo-Polish and Franco-Polish talks, is connected to the

²¹⁶ v. Ribbentrop, page 97

Czechoslovakia can no longer be justified. It is a separate attempt, with Poland's help, to finally bring about a war with the German Reich after its own rearmament has been completed. But that will be the subject of the last part of the book.

Other countries also rejected the annexation of Czechoslovakia as a German protectorate, each in its own distinct way. France lodged a protest with Germany and very soon began to make contact with Poland and Russia to coordinate with Warsaw and Moscow for a war with Germany—a war that, until then, was not even on the agenda of the German Reich government. Poland, previously Germany's accomplice in the partition of Czechoslovakia, quickly switched sides and began the aforementioned secret talks in Paris and London.

The Soviet Union condemned the German invasion and maintained the legal position that the Hitler-Hacha Agreement was unconstitutional because it had been concluded without the consent of the parliament in Prague. However, in Moscow, too, power and advantage were more important than morality and law. Thus, the Soviet government raised no objections to the simultaneous annexation of Carpathian Ruthenia by Hungary. This small piece of Czechoslovak Ukraine had always been an irritant to Moscow as the basis for a pan-Ukrainian movement. Moscow's Foreign Minister Litvinov, therefore, reportedly noted the conquest of Carpathian Ruthenia with "unconcealed satisfaction."²¹⁷

Thus, all of Czechoslovakia's neighboring states – and not just Germany – desired the dissolution of this Versailles construct. Thus, all the signatory powers of Munich – and not just Germany – never guaranteed the continued existence of Czechoslovakia, and thus all the allies abandoned Czechoslovakia when it came to trouble. Only the Soviet Union apparently would have been willing to help.

The USA, which in Saint-Germain had been one of the architects of the problematic state of Czechoslovakia, having annexed several ethnic groups there against their will and against their right to national self-determination to the Czechs, now reacted with outrage to the German violation of the Czechs' right to self-determination. Within just a few days, US President Roosevelt ordered tariffs on German goods to be raised, a bill to revise American neutrality to be introduced in Congress, and the British Navy to be massively relieved of some of its duties by the American Navy. However, this will be described in detail in connection with the later dispute over Danzig. Furthermore, Roosevelt sent remarkable letters to Hitler and Mussolini, "out of concern for all the other peoples of the entire Western Hemisphere. "

²¹⁷ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 51

As stated in the letter's introduction, he demands in the letters that Hitler and Mussolini promise him not to attack 31 named states, including Syria and Persia, for the next 10, or better yet, 25 years.²¹⁸ Roosevelt has the letters leaked to the press even before they are handed to Hitler and Mussolini; an obvious attempt to garner media attention by placing the 31 named states under the protection of the USA and to re-establish himself in the European conversation. Hitler takes advantage of the president's clumsy diplomatic maneuver and has the addressed states—with the exception of the Soviet Union, Poland, England, France, and the countries occupied by these powers—asked whether they felt threatened by Germany and whether they had requested US protection. All the questioned states answer "no" twice.

A diplomatic triumph for Hitler, an equally resounding failure for the President of the United States. Hitler retaliated against Roosevelt for the premature publication of the letter by publicly responding with a Reichstag address broadcast on the radio.²¹⁹ He referred to the responses of the supposedly threatened states and, addressing the fear of war invoked by Roosevelt in his letter, said: *"For example, after the Treaty of Versailles, from 1919 to 1938 alone, fourteen wars were fought, in which Germany, however, did not participate in any of them,*

but states of the Western Hemisphere did, on whose behalf President Roosevelt also speaks. In addition, during the same period, there were 26 violent interventions and sanctions carried out with bloody force."

Germany was completely uninvolved in this as well." Hitler then added, almost mockingly, the question of why he should also guarantee the security of the Republic of Ireland, when the Irish Prime Minister de Valera had just publicly complained that his country was suffering under England's constant aggression.

"How is it, however," Hitler continues later in his speech, "that President Roosevelt expects the German head of state to make a declaration without also inviting the other governments to make a declaration of their policies? ... Then ... with the same justification, we could also ask the President of the American Republic what goals American foreign policy pursues and what intentions underlie this policy, let's say, for example, towards the Central and South American states."

Mr. Roosevelt will certainly invoke the Monroe Doctrine in this case and reject such a demand as interference in the internal affairs of the American continent. Precisely the

²¹⁸ Roosevelt Note of April 14, 1939, see ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 200;

²¹⁹ Reichstag speech of April 28, 1939, see Domarus, Volume 2, pages 1166ff.

We Germans now advocate the same doctrine for Europe, but in any case for the area and for the interests of the Greater German Reich." Aside from Roosevelt's blunder regarding Ireland, the president also lists countries that are still colonies. This exposes the platitude of "concern" for the peoples.

In this Reichstag speech, Hitler again dismisses the annexation of Czechoslovakia by claiming that he has merely restored a situation that had already existed for almost a millennium. This self-assured response may have pleased many German listeners in April 1939, but it is a cheap triumph. It is—and this is far more significant—also a rebuke that Roosevelt will not forget.

Hitler himself considered the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia a personal success of historical significance, especially since he had achieved it as a strategic move without war. However, the consequences he drew from this latter fact were fatal. He interpreted the inaction of the governments in London, Moscow, and Paris as a sign of weakness and their inability to mount a defense. That he was bound to make this mistake is obvious. Ambassadors François-Poncet and Henderson had repeatedly threatened military intervention by France and Great Britain, and then nothing happened. In the six months that followed, Hitler would stumble over this error during the negotiations for the return of Danzig.

Hitler's miscalculation also extended to his inner circle of foreign policy advisors. Former Foreign Minister von Neurath and Minister Göring advised Hitler against the occupation of Czechoslovakia, predicting that the victorious Allied powers would respond militarily. Both were wrong. Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, on the other hand, predicted that the British and French would not act despite their threats. Von Ribbentrop's bad advice proved "correct" in this instance, fatally strengthening his position with Hitler. Six months later, during the conflict with Poland, von Ribbentrop advised the "Führer" a second time in the same manner. However, his predictions regarding the reactions from Paris and London were wrong this time, and within three days the conflict with Poland escalated into a war with France and Great Britain.

Adolf Hitler, as far as the annexation of Czechoslovakia is concerned, certainly did not seek war for war's sake. But since his speech to a group of top Wehrmacht generals in November 1937, it has been known that he wanted to make Czechoslovakia, together with German-Austria, part of the German Reich.²²⁰ And he was evidently prepared to do so all along.

²²⁰ Hitler's speech of November 5, 1937, as recorded in the Hossbach Protocol

to wage war as well. It is noteworthy that as early as November 1937, when Hitler revealed his intentions to the generals, he spoke only of Czechia, and not of Czechoslovakia. He wanted—this can be inferred—to reunite the old German Reich of the last thousand years into a single state. And neither Slovaks nor Ruthenians belonged to this Reich. The annexation of the Sudetenland was merely an intermediate goal for Hitler in pursuing this objective. However, the struggle for this intermediate goal was a legitimate action for both foreign countries and German citizens. It was the struggle for the right of self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. The forced return of the Czechs to "their old Reich," on the other hand, met with bewilderment in Germany and led to outrage abroad. Hitler's unnecessary act of violence against Czechia prompted the British, French, Soviets, and Americans to seek a suitable opportunity to wage war against Germany. The fact that the Poles sided with the Germans and Hungarians during the partition of Czechoslovakia is conveniently ignored. In the next act of this drama, the Poles are a very welcome partner for the British and French, allowing them to force Germany to confront the long-overdue Danzig question and the protection of the German minority in Poland with the disastrous choice of either making concessions or waging war, and then actually initiating that war.

The occupation of Czechia as the impetus for this further development is entirely Hitler's doing.

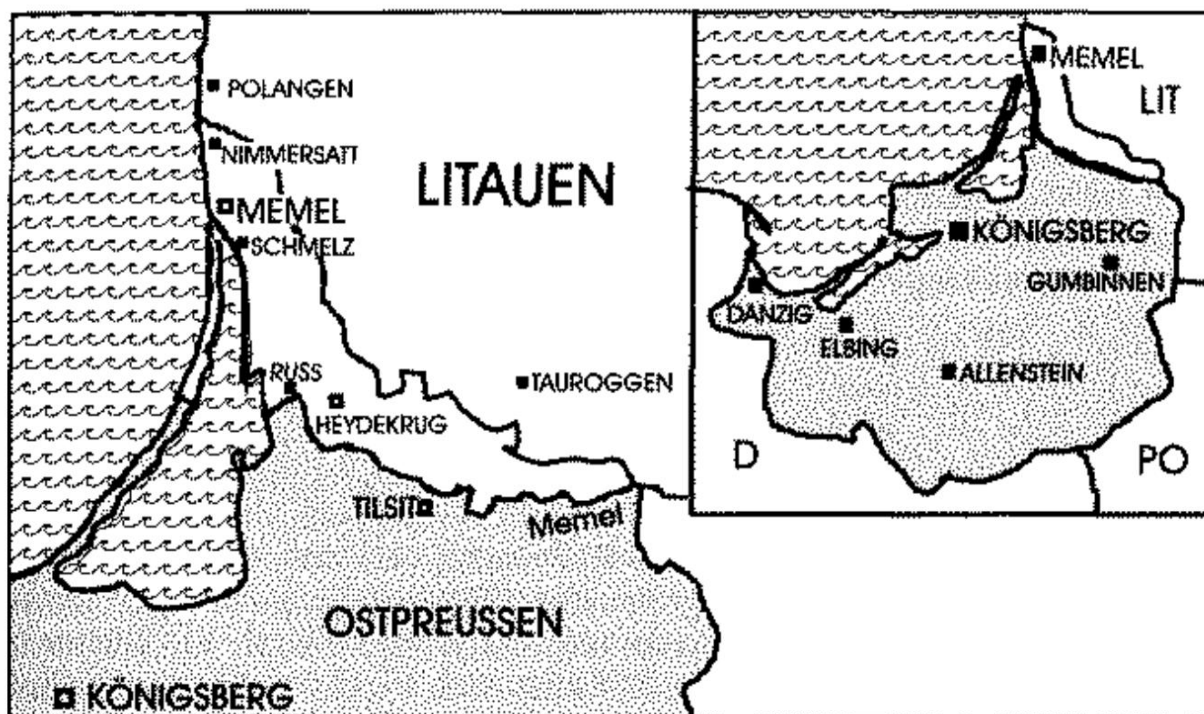
The return of Memel

The last "Anschluss" before the war falls back into Germany's lap.

On March 22, 1939, the Lithuanian government returned the Memel Territory, which had been separated in 1920, to the German Reich without resistance. This strip of land between the Nemunas River in the south and the town of Nimmersatt in the north, which geographically complements the small country of Lithuania so perfectly, had, however, never truly been Lithuanian before 1920.

Around the year 1000, the Curonians, a tribe belonging to the Latvian people, lived in this strip of land. At that time, the Lithuanians were only the next closest neighbors to the east, beyond the settlement area of the Zemaities. In the 12th and 13th centuries...

In the 16th century, the Livonian Brothers of the Sword from the north and the Teutonic Knights from the south, acting on behalf of the Pope and the Emperor, evangelized and conquered the Baltic territories along the Baltic coast. The Nemunas River (Memel) is where the two orders met. The Livonian Order, which from 1158 onwards subjugated the Curonian territory from the north, initially created the Memel Territory, later known as the Memelland, as a bridge between the two order territories. Later, the connection between the Order's lands and Latvia north of the city of Memel was severed, and in 1328 the Memelland was annexed to East Prussia, which had by then become part of Germany. The Curonians and Germans there had meanwhile formed a



Map 14: The Memel Territory during the period of separation

The population is mixed, and the Curonian language is extinct in this area. The Memel region became German around the year 1200.

In 1252, monks founded their first castle at the point where the Danje River flows into the Baltic Sea, at a place called Klajs Peda, and immediately adjacent to it a German settlement. Klajs Peda is Curonian-Latvian and literally means "flat place".

That the Teutonic Knights' "Memelburg" was the first castle on this site can be deduced from the fact that the Curonians only built their castles on hilltops. Thus, the present-day name Kleipada for the formerly German city of Memel points to a Curonian place name and not – as appearances might suggest – to a Lithuanian castle in ancient times.

From the founding of the castle and town until 1409, Memel was attacked, conquered, and burned down by Lithuanians and Curonians about half a dozen times, and each time rebuilt by Germans. In 1411, with the First Peace of Thorn, and again in 1422 with the Peace of Lake Melno, the Teutonic Order's territory north of the Memel River was stripped of its hinterland; the eastern part fell to Lithuania, and the Memel Territory received the borders it retained unchanged until 1945. Lithuanians and Germans thus became direct neighbors from 1411 onward.

Even at the time of the first German settlement, baptized Lithuanians – albeit in small numbers – migrated from the east to the territory of the Teutonic Order. They were subject to persecution in what was then still pagan Lithuania and sought refuge with the Order. Three centuries later, after the Reformation and the transformation of East-

With the transformation of Prussia and the Memelland from a religious order state into a secular duchy, the population of the Memelland changed once again.

The religious pressure exerted by churches and rulers in France, the Netherlands, Scotland, Switzerland, Austria, and Catholic Lithuania led to the immigration of many people who were allowed to continue practicing their faith in tolerant Prussia. These Dutch, Scots, Huguenots, Salzburger, and Lithuanians contributed to the national character of the Memel region.

The settlers and religious refugees from Lithuania deserve special mention here because of their later political significance. They retained their mother tongue, but unlike the people of their country of origin, they were Protestants. At the end of the First World War, these "Lithuanians of Lesser Lithuania" constituted 48% of the resident population in the Memel Territory. Despite the name and despite their mother tongue, the majority of the Lithuanians of Lesser Lithuania felt they belonged to the German cultural sphere and the German Reich. In a 1922 census on "family languages," 71,156 Memel Territory residents declared themselves to speak German and 67,259 Lithuanian, yet only 2.2% of the Lithuanians of Lesser Lithuania wished to switch from German to Lithuanian for literacy instruction in schools. German had become their second native language.

In 1919 at Versailles, the two states of Poland and Lithuania laid claim to the Memel Territory. Both saw the collapse of the defeated German Reich as an opportunity to "round up" their newly formed countries at Germany's expense.

The Poles want all of Lithuania, including the Memel Territory, for themselves, while the Lithuanians want the Memel Territory with the city of Memel as their gateway to the nearby Baltic Sea. The Lithuanian justification, presented at Versailles, states that the Memel Territory was part of the Greater Lithuanian Empire 600 years ago. It is true that the Memel Territory was once an integral part of East Prussia under the rule of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, Germany could use the same level of argumentation today to claim dominion over Hungary.

The victorious Allied powers did not grant either Poland's or Lithuania's claims to the Memel Territory. In the cover note to the Treaty of Versailles of June 19, 1919, they formally rejected the Lithuanian government's assertion that the Memel Territory had formerly been Lithuanian. The victorious powers also rebuffed German attempts to retain the Memel Territory. Three initiatives by the German Reich government and the Memel Territory's representative assembly in May, August, and September 1919 were rejected on the grounds that, according to the Treaty of Versailles, the Memel Territory was no longer part of the German Reich, and therefore negotiations with Germany on this matter were not possible.

From 1920 onwards, the victorious powers of Versailles placed the Memel Territory under joint rule in a so-called condominium and allowed it to be administered by

²²¹ Arnaszus, page 54

France placed the territory under foreign administration. On February 14, 1920, the French occupation force, a small battalion, arrived in Memel. Despite these changes, the inhabitants of the Memel Territory remained German citizens. The German administration continued its work without interruption, as did the Reichsbank and the German Reichsbahn (German State Railway). The postal service became independent, using French stamps overprinted with German text. Otherwise, the Memel Territory became its own closed customs territory. Thus, for three short years, this newly created entity had neither its own citizenship nor its own currency.

However, it is surrounded by customs borders and flies its own flag. The Memel Territory is separated from Germany and not assigned to any other state.²²² This separation is arguably the most senseless and ridiculous act of revenge by the victors; a situation that practically cries out for change.

In Lithuania, the desire for the Memel Territory remained on the agenda. Thus, on November 11, 1921, the Lithuanian Constituent Assembly resolved to "unite" the Memel Territory with Lithuania.²²³ Just over a year later, from January 10 to 16, 1923, Lithuanian armed forces invaded the Memel Territory and drove out the French. Faced with the 5,000 to 6,000 attacking Lithuanians, the French occupation force of approximately 200 soldiers was unwilling to sacrifice itself for a piece of foreign land. The Permanent Conference of Ambassadors of the victorious powers lodged a protest, and the Lithuanian government hastened to inform them that the events were an "act of desperation by the people of the Memel Territory." The government in Kaunas, however, refused to relinquish the Memel Territory, and the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris, after brief resistance, yielded to force. Initially, they demanded a plebiscite on the future of the Memel Territory, but when the conference decided on February 16 to transfer sovereignty over the Memel Territory to Lithuania, this demand was also dropped. Thus, the Treaty of Versailles was violated once again.

After Lithuania seized the Memel Territory mandate from the League of Nations by military force and successfully prevented the demanded plebiscite, the Allied Ambassadors' Conference concluded the incident by yielding. However, it required Lithuania to regulate the transfer of territory through a treaty in a convention. This so-called Memel Convention, in addition to this transfer, primarily enshrined extensive autonomy for the Memel Territories within their new state. The Memel Statute, the constitution for the transferred territory, was included as an appendix to the Memel Convention.

On May 8, 1924, the Memel Convention was signed on behalf of the League of Nations by England, France, Italy, Japan, and Lithuania. According to Article 1 of the Memel Statute, the Memel Territory henceforth constituted

²²² Article 99 of the Treaty of Versailles assigns the Memel region to the victorious powers as a whole.

²²³ Plieg, page 16

"a unity built on democratic principles under the sovereignty of Lithuania, which is granted autonomy in the areas of legislation, the judiciary, administration and finance within more precisely defined limits."

The Lithuanian government is now represented in the Memel Territory by a governor. The region governs itself through a directorate. Laws are enacted by the Memel Territory Parliament. The inhabitants of the Memel Territory become Lithuanians without having been consulted. And from then on, an influx of Lithuanian citizens from Lithuania begins; these are called Greater Lithuanians, in contrast to the previously resident Lithuanians and Memel Germans.

The first state election in the autonomous Memel Territory on October 29, 1925, with an 83% voter turnout, resulted in 94% of the votes going to the parties of the German Unity Front and 6% to the Lithuanian parties,²²⁴ a remarkable result given that 48% of the electorate were native Lithuanian speakers. With this clear vote, however, came the growing discontent. The Lithuanian governor denied the 94% majority the right to appoint the head of government. Against the protests of the state parliament, he appointed a Lithuanian, representing the 6% minority, as head of the Directorate. A complaint by the state parliament to the League of Nations, demanding that the Memel Convention be upheld in this matter, fell on deaf ears. The Memel Territories accepted the Lithuanian as head of the Directorate, and the League of Nations suffered a further loss of prestige and trust in Germany.

In December 1926, the Lithuanian government in Kaunas was ousted in a coup. The coup government imposed martial law and martial law on all of Lithuania, including the Memel Territory. The martial law was lifted after a few days. Martial law, with all its negative consequences, remained in effect until 1938. It was only lifted in the Memel Territory then, at the insistence of the German Reich government.

The following years remained a time of unpleasant conflict for the people of the Memel Territory and the Lithuanians. The Lithuanians accused the Memel Territory residents of a lack of willingness to integrate and of disloyalty. The Memel Territory residents complained of an endless series of violations of the Memel Convention by the Lithuanians. Disputes arose over the use of German as a school language and second official language, over the administration of the port of Memel, over state funding for the autonomous Memel Territory, over pension payments to be made by the state, over Lithuanian court rulings without trial or hearing, over the application of martial law in violation of the convention, over the repeated dismissal of the German-Memel Territory head of the Directorate, over press censorship, over the arrest of members of the regional parliament, and over...

²²⁴ Plieg, page 35

²²⁵ Kaunas has been Lithuania's capital since Poland occupied the city of Vilna.

the constant blocking of state parliament laws by the Lithuanian governor, and so on and so forth.

In 1934 and 1935, another event strained relations between Memel and Lithuania: the Kaunas court-martial. Beginning in February 1934, several hundred Germans from the Memel Territory were arrested and suspected of planning an uprising to liberate the Memel Territory. In January 1935, 126 Memel residents stood trial before a Lithuanian court-martial in Kaunas. They were accused of "maintaining German identity in the Memel Territory as an anti-state stance," possessing weapons, engaging in field games, and committing two acts of revenge against Lithuanians.²²⁶ However, the preparation of an armed uprising could not be proven. The sentences were four death sentences by firing squad and 89 prison terms of varying lengths. The death sentences were later commuted to prison terms. The Kaunas trial, with its charge of "maintaining German identity," not only violated the preamble of the Memel Statute, but also resonated strongly within the German Reich. Demonstrations against the verdict took place in 34 German cities. German-Lithuanian relations deteriorated from cold to frosty.

During 1935, Lithuania attempted to conclude a non-aggression pact with the German Reich. The Reich government rejected this, citing the frequent violations of the Memel Convention. In 1936, economic relations between the two countries initially improved. Nevertheless, a non-aggression pact was still not reached. Instead, in March 1938, the Reich government delivered a note to the Lithuanian government demanding full adherence to the Memel Convention. The note consisted of 11 points of complaint, which the Reich government demanded be rectified immediately. The points of contention are: the state of war since 1926, the restrictions on freedom of association, assembly, and the press, arrests by the Lithuanian war commander and the Lithuanian political police, the extensive paralysis of the legislative activities of the Memel Parliament by the frequent veto of the Lithuanian governor in contrast to the provisions of the Convention, inappropriately extensive expropriations of Memel Germans in the Memel city area in September 1937, pressure on businesses to replace German workers with Lithuanian workers, and so on.²²⁷ It is noteworthy that the Reich government does not express a single desire to cede the Memel Territory to Germany in the note outlining the "11 points of contention."

Lithuania's foreign policy situation became critical in 1938. Poland, under threat of war, forced Lithuania to recognize its 1920 annexation of Vilnius under international law. Lithuania's two allies, the French and Russians, left Lithuania without support in this dispute with Poland. A further-

²²⁶ Plieg, page 135

²²⁷ PAAA, R 29675

This event points in the same direction. In September 1938 – during the Sudetenland crisis – France also abandoned Czechoslovakia despite a mutual assistance pact. The Lithuanian government thus realized that in the event of a German-Lithuanian conflict, it too would be left without the help of its allies. Consequences were drawn in Kaunas.

Despite the unmistakable desire of the Memel Territories to return "home to the Reich," the German Reich government at that time still made no territorial demands. However, Hitler already considered a military solution to the problem as a possibility in October 1938. On October 21, he instructed the High Command of the Armed Forces: *"The Wehrmacht must be prepared at any time to annex the Memel Territory."*

to take possession." 228

However, no concrete plans or orders will follow from this initially.

As a consequence of its foreign policy situation, the Lithuanian government is now beginning to sound out the German government. The Lithuanian envoy, Saulys, will speak on the 31st. In October, in Berlin, he expressed his desire to reshape German-Lithuanian relations and requested a declaration from the Reich government on the inviolability of Lithuanian territory. This amounted to a demand that Germany definitively relinquish its claim to the Memel Territory. State Secretary von Weizsäcker in the Foreign Office remained noncommittal and demanded, before any further talks, the complete adherence to the Memel Territory's autonomy. On November 1, the first of the eleven German "points of complaint" was resolved. The state of war in the Memel Territory was lifted. However, by this time, the resentment of the Memel Territory's inhabitants over their Lithuanian rule had grown too great, and the Anschluss of Austria in March 1938 rekindled old desires. From November 1938 onward, pro-German marches and torchlight processions took place in the Memel Territory, along with open demands for its swift reintegration into the German Reich.

Nevertheless, the Reich government initially continues to hold back.

On November 20, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Urbšys informed the German envoy in Kaunas for the first time that his government was prepared to negotiate with Germany on all outstanding issues. This brought movement to the Memel Question. On December 1, 1938, the Lithuanian Consul General in Königsberg, Dymša, visited the staff of the "Deputy Führer" in Berlin and conveyed Kaunas's desire to negotiate on Memel. He declared on behalf of the government that Lithuania was now prepared to grant the Memel Territory full autonomy and to align Lithuanian foreign policy with that of the German Reich.²²⁹ His German counterpart, the diplomat Kleist, replied that, in his opinion, developments in the Memel Territory would automatically lead to the Memel Lands' return to the German Reich. Dymša responded:

²²⁸ ADAP, page D, volume IV, document 81

²²⁹ PAAA, R 29675

"In his opinion, the best solution would be the immediate commencement of German-Lithuanian negotiations. These negotiations would proceed on the German side with the automatic return of the Memel Territory to Germany. From the Lithuanian side, the starting point would be an offer of full autonomy. The result could be a compromise of joint German and Lithuanian control over Memel."

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Lithuanian diplomacy thus demonstrates a willingness to compromise. German diplomacy, however, remains tight-lipped. It initially makes preparations in complete secrecy. Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop considers inviting his Lithuanian counterpart and has two treaties drafted. The first is a German-Lithuanian treaty that envisions the return of the Memel Territory to Germany in exchange for a Lithuanian free port and economic privileges in Memel. The second draft demands only full autonomy for the Memel Territory. Furthermore, the Foreign Minister informs his ministry that a violent reconquest of the Memel Territory is not Hitler's intention. The Foreign Office files from this period repeatedly contain State Secretary von Weizsäcker's remarks.

*"We are leaving the Lithuanians in the dark about our intentions regarding Memel-
sen".*

Germany and other countries eagerly awaited the next Memel state elections. On December 11, 1938, 96% of eligible voters in the Memel region went to the polls under the watchful eyes of American, Polish, French, Italian, and British election observers and journalists.

Despite the fact that 48% of the population were native Lithuanian speakers, the German list received over 87% of the votes cast. The result appeared to be a vote by the population in favor of annexation to the German Reich. England and France reacted with alarm to this outcome. The day after the election, the governments of both powers informed the Foreign Office in Berlin *"that as signatory powers of the Memel Convention, they trust that..."*

*the German government exerted its influence on the Memel Territories in the interests of
"Maintaining the status quo is being asserted."*

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Thus, the British and French demanded that the Memel Territory remain part of Lithuania, despite the apparently opposing will of the affected population. At the time of the Memel regional elections, Hitler had not yet committed his first transgression, the invasion of the rest of Czechoslovakia. Therefore, the reactions from Paris and London cannot yet be explained as a reflex to Hitler's later aggression. England and France, even after their debacle at the Munich Conference and the annexation of the Sudetenland, were still in a position of political aggression.

²³⁰ PAAA, R 29675

²³¹ PAAA, R 29675

²³² PAAA, R 29675

The German Reich is still not ready to rectify its own mistakes from Versailles. They are leaving it to the Germans.

The reactions from Berlin and Kaunas to the state elections were something like the calm before the storm. On February 2, 1939, Rudolf Hess, the "Deputy Führer," issued a top-secret directive to the German authorities in the Memel Territory and the German Reich, stating *"that all efforts by German party offices towards the Memel Territory*

should cease, that any conflict with the Lithuanian government should be avoided for the time being, and that the Memel German leadership should be held responsible for the implementation of this directive."

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The German Reich government thus exercised restraint. The Lithuanian government initially allowed developments in the Memel Territory to proceed freely before applying the brakes again in February. Bilingualism now became mandatory for the Lithuanian authorities in the Memel Territory as well. From then on, the language of instruction was determined by parental wishes. The Lithuanian State Security Police had to leave the area, even though they continued to monitor the German-speaking inhabitants of the Memel Territory disguised as railway and border police. The Lithuanian coat of arms was removed from the schools, along with the pictures of President Smetona. But despite all these concessions, the mood of the population increasingly pressed for annexation to the German motherland. Counter-reactions soon arose among the Lithuanian-oriented segment of the Memel Territory population. Fights between youths of both nationalities and broken windows showed that tensions were rising on both sides. On March 12, 600 Lithuanians, 450 of them armed with rifles, disrupted a German ceremony at a war memorial. Both sides viewed the ceremony and the disruption as serious provocations.

On March 15, 1939, the Wehrmacht marched into Bohemia and Moravia. The German inhabitants of the Memel Territory took this as a good omen and hoped for a subsequent invasion of German troops into the Memel Territory. The newly elected parliament, elected in December, had still not been convened for its first session by the Lithuanian governor. On March 15, Dr. Neumann, the representative of the German party list, gave a public speech in front of the parliament building. He lamented the violation of the Memel Territory's right to self-determination. He denounced the economic decline of the region under Lithuanian rule and demanded that the governor convene the parliament for its first session by March 25. Two days later, Dr. Neumann... Neumann gave an interview to representatives of the Reuters news agency and the Daily Telegraph, in which he publicly stated for the first time that the German population of the Memel Territory expected annexation by the German Reich and hoped the Lithuanian government would relinquish the territory. He added that the people of the Memel Territory had no-

would feel no hostility towards the Lithuanian population, nor towards the Lithuanian soldiers²³⁴. – The cat is out of the bag.

The Neumann Declarations were followed by Lithuanian inquiries in Paris and London. The French government stated that it had not given any guarantee to Lithuania. The British responded evasively and cryptically. The Lithuanians, who had often disregarded the Memel Convention in the past, now found no protection under its umbrella. On March 20, after Lithuania found no support in Paris and London, Foreign Minister Urbšys traveled to Berlin to meet with Ribbentrop. The German minister, who had previously always remained publicly reserved regarding Memel, now took advantage of his Lithuanian counterpart's desperate situation. He knew that Lithuania once seized the Memel Territory without right and by force, that it had failed to uphold the Memel Convention for the longest time, that the people of the Memel Territories overwhelmingly voted for the German Reich, and that Lithuania now finds no support among the victorious powers. Von Ribbentrop begins his conversation with Urbšys by stating that the people of the Memel Territories want to return to Germany. He then presents Urbšys with a choice.

“There are two possibilities,” said von Ribbentrop, “a friendly settlement followed by friendly relations between the two countries. In this case, we would be economically generous and resolve the free port issue in Lithuania’s favor. Otherwise, it is impossible to see where this development will end. If uprisings and shootings occur in the Memel Territory, Germany will not stand idly by. The Führer will act swiftly, and the situation will then be determined by the military.”

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Von Ribbentrop ended the meeting with an offer of a treaty that would regulate both the return of Memel and the free port for Lithuania. Urbšys requested a few days to consider, but von Ribbentrop pressed on, advising that a representative be sent as quickly as possible to conclude the treaty. The Lithuanian minister returned to Kaunas that same day.

The following day, starting at 2 p.m., the Lithuanian cabinet deliberated on the German offer, which apparently left no other option. At 7 p.m., the decision was made to return the Memel Territory. President Smetona was then informed of the decision. At 12:20 a.m., the press office informed the media. The next day, the 22nd, both countries concluded the treaty offered by Germany, which brought the Memel Territory back into the Reich and guaranteed Lithuania a free port in Memel and certain rights. Almost simultaneously, notes from the Lithuanian government were sent to the signatories in London, Rome, Paris, and Tokyo, who, according to Article 15 of the Memel Convention, were required to "consent to the transfer of sovereign rights over the Memel Territory." The addressed-

²³⁴ Plieg, page 205
²³⁵ PAAA, R 29675, Sheet 120813

The Allied powers declare that they will take no action against the return of the Memel Territory to Germany. Thus, the Memel Territory will be ceded on the 22nd.

In March 1939, Germany became German again under international law.

As early as the night of the 23rd, the Lithuanian military began withdrawing from Memel, as stipulated in the agreement. In the early morning hours, three German army battalions stationed nearby marched in from Tilsit, and a dozen ships of the Kriegsmarine docked in the port of Memel. The entire handover was a non-military operation.

The annexation of the Memel Territory corresponds to the will of the vast majority of the affected population, and it follows a treaty valid under international law.

It certainly cannot be said that the Lithuanians' renunciation was an act of free will. It was more likely an act of insight, a decision to relinquish what one could no longer hold. On May 15, 1939, the British government recognized the return of the Memel Territory in a note, writing:

"Her Majesty's Embassy... has the honor to inform the (German) Foreign Ministry, on behalf of Her Majesty's Foreign Ministry, that Her Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom has decided to recognize the German union with Memel de jure- 236 237

no. ..."

This de jure recognition is remarkable insofar as it was soon forgotten in England and by the other victorious powers of the First World War. At the Potsdam Conference in 1945, British Prime Minister Churchill and US President Truman jointly defined what, according to their interpretation, constituted "Germany." For them, it was Germany within its 1937 borders, excluding Memel. The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg also declared the return of Memel in its 1946 verdict to be one of six violations of the Treaty of Versailles.²³⁸

This judgment overlooks the fact that the governments of England and France did not object to the return of the territory in 1939 when questioned by Lithuania, thereby effectively nullifying Article 99 of the Treaty of Versailles. It also overlooks the British government's "de jure recognition," by which the British stated in 1939 that their recognition was "by right" and not based on the facts created or as a result of force.

The powers of Versailles instigated the dispute between Lithuanians and Germans over Memel in 1920. If this wasn't done with malicious intent, it was at least a senseless act. To separate a piece of land and its population from the motherland without knowing to whom it would ultimately be awarded is a destructive act devoid of sense and wisdom. The victors of the First World War, who had always claimed to stand for democracy, freedom, and self-reliance,

²³⁶ Plieg, page 224

²³⁷ Parentheses indicate author's note

²³⁸ IMT, Volume XXII, page 522

Having invoked the right of peoples to determine their own destiny, they never once cared about the rights and freedoms of the affected population in the Memel region.

The Lithuanians bear no less responsibility for the conflict. They conquered the territory in 1923 through military force. During their 15 years of rule, they so frequently undermined and violated the legal framework for the coexistence of the Memel Germans and the Lithuanians of Lesser Lithuania that the historically peaceful relationship between the two groups was quickly poisoned. Furthermore, Lithuania was not so vital and attractive as to offer the Germans, who had been forcibly naturalized, a new homeland as a multi-ethnic state.

The third sinner is the League of Nations, which failed from the very beginning as a guardian of peace over the Memel region.

The return of the Memel Territory within just one week, from Dr. Neumann's initial public demand to the conclusion of the treaty, and its swift recognition by the victorious powers, represents another success for Adolf Hitler; the latest in a long line of triumphs. Without the victors of 1918, there would have been no need for the return of German troops to the Rhineland garrisons, the Saarland, the Sudetenland, and the Memel Territory to be re-annexed, and there would have been no Austria, forced into independence against the will of its people and parliament. All of this could have been resolved by the victors in Versailles and Saint-Germain without Hitler, if they had truly desired peace with the Germans in the future.

After this string of successes, it is no wonder that Hitler is now attempting, firstly, to annex the German city of Danzig to Germany, and secondly, that he no longer properly assesses the victors of the First World War.

Besides all the revisions that Hitler can claim as his achievements from the Saar to the Memel, only two questions remain open: the question of the return of Danzig and the question of the return of the former German colonies by the victorious powers.

The open colonial question

The Italian conquest of Abyssinia was not the only upheaval stemming from the post-World War I conflict over colonies. The problem of rapidly growing populations coupled with insufficient raw materials and food supplies at the time concerned not only the Italians. Poles, Japanese, Germans, and other nations were also affected. Thus, the drive for new "living space" remained a central aspect of foreign policy for many states until World War II.

The USA and Russia solved their "living space problems" by expanding across continents, thereby displacing, decimating, and subjugating peoples deemed less advanced. Their colonial sphere has long

It had already become an integral part of the national territory before 1918, so that it is no longer considered a colony under international law or in common parlance. Despite this saturation of living space, the USA still maintained colonies outside its own borders after the First World War: the Philippines, Guam, Eastern Samoa, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii.

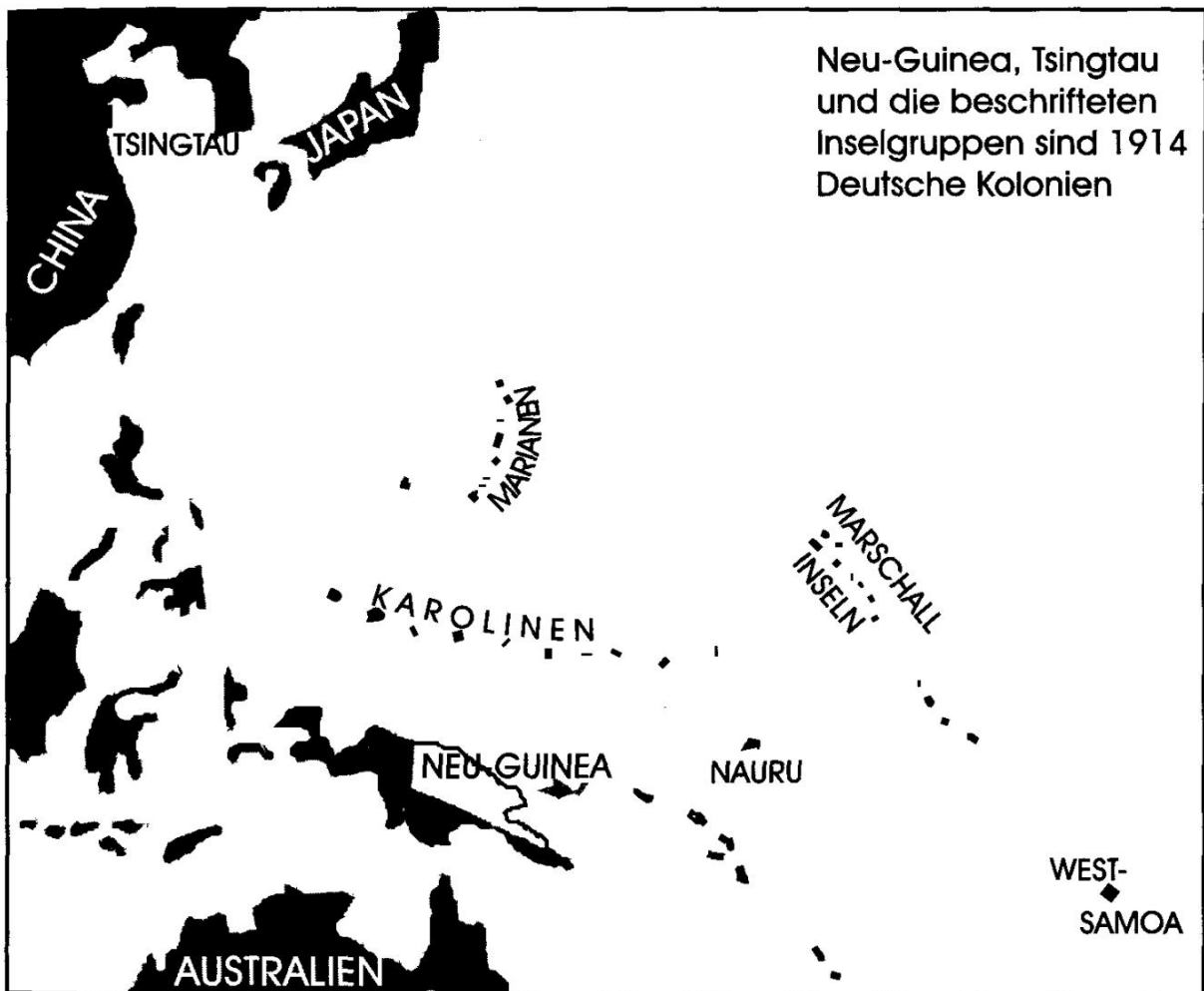
England and France established their colonial empires overseas. Since there was no territorial connection to the mother country, and since the subjugated peoples could not be decimated and displaced like the Native Americans, these colonies remained colonies under international law. Only in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia was it possible, as in the USA, to force the indigenous population into inhospitable regions and establish first colonies and then vassal states there. The colonies and dominions provided troops to Great Britain and France during the First World War.

At the end of the war, Wilson proposed a peace to Germany with his Fourteen Points. In the fifth point of the Fourteen Points, he promised a "free, unprejudiced and absolutely impartial settlement of all colonial claims," but this was never to come to pass.



Map 15: German colonies in Africa 1914

Despite the already achieved saturation of power, in 1920 England and France seized the bulk of the remaining German colonies. With German Southwest Africa (Namibia), German East Africa (Tanzania), Togo, Northeast New Guinea, and the Pacific island groups of Nauru and Western Samoa, 1,200,000 square kilometers of German colonial territory were incorporated into the British Empire. France received approximately 500,000 square kilometers with Cameroon. Italy gained 80,000 square kilometers as part of a territorial exchange in Africa. Belgium received Rwanda along with Burundi, and Japan took over the Mariana and Marshall Islands in the Pacific from Germany. However, this redistribution did not solve the "living space problem" of Italy and Japan.



Map 16: The German colonies in the Pacific, 1914

Italy's dispute over Abyssinia has already been described. In 1914, Japan—like Italy in 1915—was persuaded by England to declare war on Germany with the promise that it would be awarded the German colonies in the Pacific north of the equator in the event of a German defeat. At Versailles, the USA prevented Japan from receiving its full spoils. German rights in Shandong, China, were denied to Tokyo, and Japan had to cede its conquests south of the equator to England and Australia. Despite its small war effort,

Despite its economic gains, Japan in 1920, like other nations, still faced the problems of a rapidly growing population and the scarcity of food, coal, oil, and ores. Two further difficulties arose after the First World War. The USA changed its immigration laws, barring Japanese citizens from entering the country, and imposed tariffs and import regulations to keep Japanese products out of its own market. This increased population pressure on Japan's islands while the foreign currency reserves with which the country could purchase goods abroad dwindled. Both factors further fueled the drive for new colonies.

Japan had already begun building a colonial empire when the hunt for colonies was still open. In 1895, it seized Formosa (Taiwan), then Korea in 1910, and in 1915 it attempted to establish a foothold in China. However, after the "sale" of 1920, Japan continued its efforts to expand its colonial empire. From 1931 to 1934, it conquered Manchuria. This placed Japan, along with Italy, in the dock as a latecomer to the colonial game, a position often cited by those states that, from 1920 onward, merely defended their existing colonial possessions.

Poland – facing similar difficulties – initially expanded its living space at Russia's expense when it conquered parts of Belarus and Ukraine in 1920 and then annexed them as "Eastern Poland." However, given the ever-increasing population, this clearly did not solve the problem, as Foreign Minister Beck revealed to the foreign press in 1939. At a press conference on January 26, 1939, the minister stated that Poland had an interest in colonies "because it is seeking land for emigration and needs raw materials for its industry." For this reason, Minister Beck explained, cooperation with

Countries that possess colonies were sought.²³⁹ Beck's statements show that the Poles have the same concerns as many other peoples. Hitler, with his Lebensraum ideas, was not an isolated case in his time, and this problem was not as extraordinary in the 1920s and 30s as it seems to us today.

It is largely the same nations that speak of the right of peoples to self-determination and that maintain colonies. The contradiction, which even the victorious powers at Versailles recognized, finds its solution in a new interpretation of colonial rule. In Part I of the League of Nations Act, Article 22 now defines colonial rule as...

"Guardianship over peoples who are not yet able to govern themselves under the particularly difficult conditions of the modern world, by advanced nations."

According to this new interpretation, the rule of the Americans, British, and French is a blessing for those who are unable to find their way in this world, even though Indians, Syrians, Egyptians, and many others repeatedly asked their colonial masters to finally withdraw after the First World War.

²³⁹ Archive of the Present, page 3905

The dictator Hitler, in his thinking about colonies and living space, was a product of his time. His ideas and statements on food and raw material issues, living space and colonies, run like a common thread through his life, but he frequently changed his position on them. In his book "Mein Kampf," Hitler writes in 1924 that Germany should renounce its imperial colonies and instead seek living space in the East.²⁴⁰ This is certainly the result of the experience gained in the First World War. As a second-rate naval power, the German Reich had no chance of importing food, coal, oil, and ores from its colonies during the war. The British and Americans prevented this in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and the Japanese in the Pacific. A colony in Eastern Europe would certainly have been more useful to Germany during the war. From 1928 to 1933, Hitler remains silent on the subject of living space and colonies, presumably to avoid alienating anyone in his struggle for the chancellorship. Immediately after taking office in February 1933, Hitler takes up the topic again. In his inaugural address to high-ranking Reichswehr officers, he develops ideas on the problem of a growing population and a persistently inadequate food supply. He poses the question of what would be better: a colony overseas or new settlement land in Eastern Europe.

This speech will be discussed later in this book.

Since his inaugural address, Hitler repeatedly referred to the "new living space" in closed circles and secret speeches, without explicitly stating before the war that he was referring to Ukraine. Thus, the topic remained purely theoretical and academic for both the Party and the Wehrmacht until the war. Even as events in the summer of 1939 inexorably led to war, Hitler did not connect "living space in the East" with Poland. Hitler's statements in public speeches and to foreign countries, however, were a different matter. Here he speaks primarily of Germany's former colonies, which he had already written off in "Mein Kampf." Often, when the food and raw material situation in Germany is discussed in the Reichstag, Hitler refers to two goals: he wants to make Germany economically self-sufficient, that is, as independent as possible from foreign trade, and he demands an overseas colony. At the Reich Party Congress on September 9, 1936, the dictator proclaims the goal of German Reich autarky in raw material extraction and adds:

"Regardless, Germany cannot forgo resolving its colonial demands."

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At the "Party Congress of Labour" a year later, on September 7, 1937, he said in his speech: *"The demand for*

colonial possessions belonging to the Reich is therefore grounded in our economic hardship. And the attitude of the other powers to this demand is simply incomprehensible."

²⁴⁰ Hitler, pages 736 ff

²⁴¹ Domarus, Volume 1, page 637

stately. Germany once did not surrender its colonies to these powers.

"Neither robbed nor stolen." ²⁴²

The last sentence contains a hint of reproach towards the British. While Germany had acquired its colonies through treaties or purchases, England's colonies were mostly conquered.

In the autumn of 1936 and February 1937, the German Minister of Economics and President of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Schacht, acting on Hitler's authority, submitted a proposal first to the French and then to the British to resolve all outstanding disputes between France, Great Britain, and Germany in a comprehensive arrangement. This was also to include a settlement of the colonial question. Schacht proposed Cameroon and Togo, which were to be placed under German economic management but not under German sovereignty.²⁴³ In this way, the two colonies would be open to trade by all states, and it would not create the impression that England and France had to return conquered territories to the German Reich. Schacht's proposal was moderate, but it was rejected first by England and then by France.

In the following years, Hitler kept this point of "Versailles injustice" on the agenda by occasionally bringing it up. He discussed the topic with the ambassadors of England, France, Poland, and the League of Nations representative for Danzig, without, however, demanding all of Germany's former colonies or urging haste. For example, he told the French Foreign Minister Bonnet and the League of Nations representative, Professor Burckhardt, that he "needs space in the East for grain and a colony for timber." Compared to the colonial territories of other nations, which were significantly smaller than Germany's, this was a rather modest request, but measured against the self-image of the British and French, it was pure dynamite.

On November 19, 1937, the future Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, as emissary of the British government, visited Hitler at the Berghof. According to the English media, the purpose of the trip was the Prime Minister's intention to settle relations with Germany and to discuss the remaining open questions, including the colonial question.²⁴⁷ After a few greetings, Lord Halifax opened the conversation with critical remarks about the treatment of churches, Jews, and trade unions in the German Reich. He added, however, the acknowledgment that Hitler, by destroying communism in his own country, had saved Western Europe from Bolshevism. The focus of the ensuing exchange of views between Halifax and Hitler

²⁴² Domarus, Volume 1, page 716

²⁴³ Bevendamm, Roosevelt's Road to War, pages 240 ff.

²⁴⁴ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 6, page 283

²⁴⁵ Burckhardt, page 341

²⁴⁶ Bonnet, page 247

²⁴⁷ The course of the following conversation: ADAP, Series D, Volume 1, pages 46-56 and PAAA, R 29575 Fiche 215

The colonial question was at stake. Lord Halifax was the first to concede that "the errors of the Treaty of Versailles must be rectified," but only through "sensible arrangements." England was not generally opposed to the return of colonies to Germany, but London could not negotiate this with Berlin alone. A new distribution of colonies was conceivable only within the framework of a comprehensive European agreement. Hitler countered that while the British government was willing to discuss colonies, its own party, the Conservatives, categorically rejected any return. He added that it was not Germany's place to make demands, but rather the place of the victors to propose solutions. After all, Germany had a right to its former possessions. Either the colonial question would eventually be "settled in the free play of forces," or a "sensible solution" would be found beforehand. Hitler concluded his remarks by assuring them that he would also accept acceptable compensation proposals if England or France believed, for strategic reasons, that they could not return certain colonies. Halifax's subsequent account of this conversation with Hitler contains a thought that, however, no one acted upon:

"Instead of trying to buy Hitler's colonial demands with a 'free hand' in Europe, one should take the possibly sensible path and offer him a colonial settlement in exchange for him showing himself to be a good European."

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Despite good intentions, no progress was made on the question of the return of former German colonies, not even after Halifax himself became Foreign Minister in 1938. In March 1938, the British ambassador in Berlin merely raised the possibility of giving Germany a territory in Africa, roughly corresponding to the Congo Basin.²⁴⁹ The mention of the Congo can be interpreted as an offer at Belgium's expense. No action followed the proposal.

A year after the Halifax visit, on September 19, 1938, Prime Minister Chamberlain met with Hitler to discuss the question of the Sudeten Germans' return "home to the Reich." Hitler also made sure to mention the colonies.

*"This question," said Hitler, "is not a military demand."
However, it must also be fulfilled at some point, and Germany will never deviate from it."*

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After Chamberlain's visit and the annexation of the Sudetenland, relations between London and Berlin grew colder again. Hitler's threat of war had been too strong. When, six months later, the remainder of Czechoslovakia was made a German protectorate, anger in England was immense. Hitler had established himself here in a-

²⁴⁸ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Second Series, Volume XIX, Document 336

²⁴⁹ Weizsäcker Papers, page 497, footnote 12

²⁵⁰ ODSUN documents, page 758

a type of approach that is not accepted in London. Above all, they do not want England to one day lose the former German colonies it acquired in 1920 under German pressure in the same way. But before the colonies, Danzig is clearly on the agenda. And so, from the occupation of Czechoslovakia onward, the British government attempts to erect a barrier for the Germans, forcing them to either halt or start a war themselves. From now on, England is determined to use the Danzig dispute to put a stop to further German revisions before it comes to England's own war gains. Consequently, the British guarantee to Poland against Germany and the further expansion of the army, air force, and navy follow.

Hitler, who had always sought a partnership with Great Britain and who would try to reach an agreement with London until the very last day before the outbreak of war, touched upon one of England's two sore points. The second point—as will be explained later—was the rearmament of the navy. Hitler, in the eyes of the English, had pointed to Germany's claim to the colonies too frequently and too clearly. Too frequently and too clearly, even though he always emphasized that this question could only be resolved amicably and without time pressure at some point.

Despite the situation, which Hitler had exacerbated with the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Anglo-German talks continued – albeit only at the bureaucratic level. On July 18, 1939, an exploratory meeting took place between the British Treasury and the Office of the Commissioner for the Four-Year Plan regarding possibilities for political, economic, and military cooperation between the two countries. An English representative spoke of a "joint development of Africa by the European colonial powers," without, however, mentioning Germany's direct participation.²⁵¹ He included English, Portuguese, Spanish, Belgian, French, and formerly German colonies in such a construct. Thus, every proposal from England between 1937 and 1939 remained non-binding, and each time London's intention to compensate Germany, even at the expense of other states, was evident.

Ensuring an unimpeded and crisis-proof supply of raw materials for Germany's industry and food for Germany's ever-growing population was a constant theme in Hitler's foreign and economic policy. The dictator saw three possible solutions to the problem, all of which led to conflicts with the victors of the First World War. One approach suggested that if Germany increased its foreign trade even further, it would clash with its competitors from England, the USA, and France. Furthermore, the customs sovereignty of these three states in their colonies, the naval supremacy of America and England, and the dominance of the USA in South America could, in times of crisis, close off all trading ports in North and South America to Germany.

²⁵¹ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 716 218

Close off Asia, Africa, and Australia. If Germany—according to the second solution—demands its former colonies from England, Belgium, and France, war is highly likely. Hitler's considerations in this direction will be presented in the next chapter of the book, based on his numerous speeches. The third solution is a German-dominated economic sphere in Southeast and Eastern Europe.

PART 3

**THE REFAMOUS PLAN BETWEEN
1918 AND 1939**

The rearmament between 1918 and 1939

The disarmament mandate of Versailles

The international arms build-up after the First World War

Fleet Armament

Air armament, armament of the land forces

The Geneva disarmament negotiations up to 1933

The secret defense preparations of the Reichswehr up to 1933

The secret defense preparations in the Reichswehr

The secret defense preparations of the Imperial Navy

The secret preparations for the establishment of an air force

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Hitler and the Geneva disarmament negotiations up to 1934

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Naval armament 1933 to 1939

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Army armaments 1933 to 1939

Guilt and complicity

THE REFAMOUS PLAN BETWEEN 1918 AND 1939

Parallel to the events of the 1920s and 30s just described, a process is underway that, from today's perspective and by all appearances, is leading Germany directly toward a new war: the rearmament of the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht. In the context of this book, it is interesting to consider whether the German population in general, and the Wehrmacht in particular, knowingly contributed to the conflagration of 1939 before the Second World War. Given the rearmament, the question arises whether the population and the Wehrmacht could or should have known before 1939, based on these events, that Hitler would risk another war or even intend to wage one. In that case, both would be complicit and complicit. However, if the rearmament was based on other reasons and interpretations at the time, then neither complicity nor complicity can be attributed to the population or the Wehrmacht. The expansion of the army, the development of the air force, and the tripling of the navy's tonnage should surely have served as a warning to the people of the German Reich.

The disarmament mandate of Versailles

World War I ended with the Treaty of Versailles, which was intended to lay the foundation for a lasting peace in Europe. Among other things, the treaty contained far-reaching obligations for all signatory states to disarm their armies after the war. This obligation therefore did not apply solely to defeated Germany.

In Part I of the Treaty of Versailles, Article 8, all signatory states declare *"that the maintenance of peace necessitates the reduction of national armaments to the minimum level compatible with national security"*.

Only Part V of the treaty stipulates that Germany must reduce its armed forces to 100,000 men in the army and to 15,000 men in the navy.

"to enable the introduction of a general arms restriction by all nations".

Besides limiting the size of land forces and navies, the Treaty of Versailles also stipulated that the German Reich was prohibited from possessing military aircraft, heavy artillery, tanks, and certain other war materiel. The accompanying note of June 16, 1919, with which the French mini-

President Clemenceau, in sending the treaty text to the German Reich government "on behalf of the Allies," reiterated the victorious powers' commitment to reduce the size of their own armies after German disarmament was complete. The note stated:

*"German disarmament represents the first step towards the general reduction and limitation of armaments. ... Once Germany has shown the way, the Allied and Associated Powers will confidently follow the same path."*¹

The victors thereby committed to their own disarmament by the time German disarmament was completed. That moment would have arrived at the beginning of 1927. On January 31, 1927, the Inter-Allied Military Commission of the victorious powers officially declared that the German Reich had completed its disarmament in accordance with the treaty. According to the spirit and letter of the Treaty of Versailles, this should have been the starting signal for a comprehensive and global wave of disarmament after the First World War.

The international arms build-up after the First World War

Fleet Armament

However, the reality outside the German Reich after the First World War was quite different. Despite the preamble to Part V of the Treaty of Versailles, in which the victorious powers promised disarmament, an arms race of global proportions began. The term "arms race" itself reflects the reasons. The participating states were concerned with their further ambitions and competitive positions after eliminating their three major rivals: Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Germany. The rearmament of the states surrounding Germany and worldwide formed the backdrop against which the Germans viewed their "catch-up" strategy from 1934 onward.

The first round is played by the four remaining major competitors: England, the USA, Japan, and, in a supporting role, the Soviet Union. Great Britain, based on its own self-image and to secure its colonial empire, claims to be the world's leading naval power. The USA perceives England's naval strength in the Atlantic and its bases off the coast of Central America as a threat in the east, and Japan's expansionist policies in Asia as a threat in the west.

Japan – an ally of both superpowers in the First World War – distanced itself after the war when the USA contested the German colonies in the Pacific, which England had promised the Japanese as a reward for entering the war against Germany before the war.³

¹ v. Oertzen, page 13;

² Schwarz, pages 35 ff.

³ British-Japanese agreement of 16 February 1917. See Wilson Documents, Volume I, page 58

Japan, England, the USA, and the Soviet Union also pursued economic and hegemonic interests in the Pacific, particularly vis-à-vis China. The USA demanded the "open door" principle for Asia, including free access to China's large domestic market and, in turn, the reduction of China's external tariffs.

Japan countered this demand by demanding that the Americans open their market to goods and products from all over Asia. Great Britain was already active in China at that time, both through trade and military means. It had stationed troops and ships there and intervened in internal Chinese disputes with landing forces in 1922, 1923, 1926, and 1927. In 1928, Japan asserted its own interests in Shandong. In 1929, Russian troops invaded Manchuria, and in 1931, Japan occupied all of Manchuria.

Thus, the Versailles approach of reducing troops was immediately undermined by the victorious powers of the USA, Great Britain, and Japan after the First World War. During their race for dominance in the Far East, the three nations continued their naval buildup, which has been running at full speed ever since the war.⁴ US President Wilson was the first to revive naval armament after the war. He reacted angrily to the rejection of a large part of his Fourteen Points of Peace by the British and French at Versailles. A particular point of contention was his second point, in which he had demanded "absolute freedom of navigation on the seas" in peace and war, a point that would have permanently prohibited England from imposing naval blockades. The British ensured that this point was not negotiated at Versailles, and Wilson reacted. In 1919, he had the US Congress pass a new super-fleet construction program, which represented a doubling of all American warship construction during the recently concluded war. Great Britain and Japan followed suit in 1920 with their own shipbuilding programs.⁵ Both now saw their naval power threatened by the USA. Thus, it was initially the three major naval powers that opposed the disarmament agreed upon at Versailles.

The presidential elections of 1920 in the USA seemingly marked a turning point.

President Harding, who succeeded the ousted Wilson, pursued a different policy regarding the navy. On the one hand, Harding felt committed to the idea of disarmament; on the other hand, he recognized that a strategic problem was arising for the United States. The trend in naval armament across all nations led to ever larger new ships. Ships that were too large, especially wide, could no longer pass through the Panama Canal, yet the US Navy needed to be able to navigate the canal from the Pacific to the Atlantic if it was to be operational in both oceans. For this reason, the US could no longer keep pace with other nations' shipbuilding efforts once their new vessels could no longer fit through the Panama Canal.

⁴ Potter/Nimitz, page 448

⁵ Potter/Nimitz, page 449

The US government proposed to the invited nations that the total tonnage of all fleets be limited, that quotas for battleships and capital ships be allocated to each nation, that allocate unfinished new ships be scrapped, and that no new capital ships be laid down for ten years. In response to this proposal, the US, Great Britain, Japan, France, and Italy agreed in 1922 to a ten-year moratorium on the construction of large ships and accepted that they could only maintain aircraft carriers and capital ships in a ratio of 100 for the US and Great Britain, 60 for Japan, and 35 for France and Italy.

America is rid of its concerns about the Panama Canal for a few years, and Japan's naval expansion is temporarily slowed down.

Instead of reducing shipbuilding in the spirit of the Washington Agreement, the Treaty of Versailles, and the Geneva Disarmament Negotiations that began in 1926, the aforementioned countries focused on modernizing their "light" naval forces, which were not subject to the ten-year shipbuilding moratorium. Thus, during the ten-year moratorium, France replaced 10 of its 14 protected cruisers with modern ships and 26 of its 59 destroyers. The USA replaced 18 of its 21 protected cruisers with new vessels, Japan 22 out of a total of 32, and Italy replaced 43 of its 56 destroyers with new and modern ones.

Ships⁸. In contrast, the defeated German Reich only built 5 light cruisers in the same period to replace old ships, and only laid the keel for its first armored ship in 1930.

In 1930, during the global economic crisis, the British government attempted to curb the armament of its "light" naval forces. It convened a naval conference in London. France and Italy refused to submit to further quotas for naval construction. Germany, which requested an invitation of its own accord, was not admitted to the conference. Thus, the London Naval Agreement of 1930 applied only to Great Britain, Japan, and the USA, and even then only for a short time.

For example, from 1931 onward, Great Britain built 3 new cruisers, 9 destroyers, and 3 submarines annually.⁹ The naval powers began to make up for their ten-year construction freeze even before Adolf Hitler could exert influence on the Reichsmarine's armament planning from 1933 onward. At this time, Great Britain, Japan, and the USA were vying for supremacy in the Pacific, and France and Italy for that in the Mediterranean. The arms race was in full swing before Germany

⁶ Weyers 1922, pages 355 ff

⁷ Cruiser with armored deck

⁸ Weyers 1932, pages 54 ff

⁹ Dressen, page 105

from 1934 onwards, this trend became apparent. The widely held opinion today that the global arms buildup in the 1930s was initiated by Hitler's Germany is therefore completely erroneous. The traditional naval powers, the USA, Japan, and Great Britain, at least, had already significantly upgraded their fleets as their "main weapon" long before Hitler entered the scene in 1933.

This raises a question regarding the perspective. In historical accounts, the later German rearmament is seen as an indication of early German war intentions. The military strengths of Germany, England, and America are cited as evidence, among other things. This makes the German rearmament appear particularly drastic and highlights the peace-loving nature of England and America in stark contrast. However, such a comparison is flawed, incorrect, and misleading. It places the relatively weak armies of naval powers alongside the large army of the land power, Germany. An equally flawed comparison that measured the three nations solely by their navies would require attributing war intentions to England and the USA using the same flawed logic. In 1931, the naval ratio between England, the USA, and Germany was 10 to 9 to 1. Even after the German Reich's rearmament at the outbreak of war in September 1939, the ratio remained 10 for England to 9.2 for the USA to 1.7 for Germany. Given the superiority of the Royal and US Navy, it is doubtful that the Admiralty of the Reichsmarine and its naval officer corps suspected before 1937 that Hitler might one day want to use this modest fleet for a war of aggression.

Air armament

Air armament in Europe was also not initially driven by Germany after the First World War. Here, it was primarily France and Italy that provided the impetus.

In the early 1920s, the Italian General Douhet developed a new theory of aerial warfare.¹⁰ His novel idea was that future wars would be decided by air power. According to Douhet, bombing residential areas and industrial facilities in enemy territory was a suitable means of breaking the will to fight of the "affected" population and crippling further weapons production. With such a doctrine, the air forces of any state become a potential threat to every other country within their range. It is thus understandable that, from 1922 onward, Great Britain felt threatened by France and attempted to close the gap with France's lead in air power.

¹⁰ Douhet writes the book "Il dominio del l'aria" (The Dominion of the Air)

After the First World War, France maintained its Air Force with 300 bombers, 300 fighters, and other military aircraft in active service. In contrast, England had only a total of 40 bombers and fighters left in 1922. When the Times in London revealed this fact in March 1922, it sent shockwaves throughout England. The English population felt threatened within the radius of the then-powerful French bomber fleet. This did not go unnoticed. In 1923, the House of Commons in London resolved to establish 52 new air force squadrons as quickly as possible.¹¹ England also adopted Douhet's idea of using bombers against the civilian population. On November 28, 1932, the Conservative leader Baldwin, in a House of Commons debate, spoke—albeit with an expression of regret—about his vision for the bombing war of the future:

"The only possible defense here is attack. This means that if you want to save yourself, you have to kill more women and children faster than the enemy." Thus, England and France are engaged in a race to build up ¹²

their military forces, instead of the French reducing their air force as stipulated in the Treaty of Versailles. In 1932, France has approximately 1,500 combat aircraft, England 60,013, and Germany none. The English debate in November 1932 cannot yet be based on a threat from the German Reich. It shows that the later, mercilessly harsh British bombing campaign against the civilian population in Germany had its origins in this earlier period.

France and Italy were also arming themselves against each other. Both were competing for influence and territory in Savoy, Corsica, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. Italy had 1,500 military aircraft by 1932. Furthermore, Russia was building a respectable air force. From 1925, Tupolev produced the world's first all-metal bomber, and from 1930, the first four-engine heavy bomber. In March 1932, a heavy bomber corps was established. In 1930, approximately 860 military aircraft of all types were manufactured annually in the Soviet Union. By 1935, this number had risen to 3,500 per year. All this armament—which also

The effects of this event spread to the German Reich. On July 28, 1932 – still under the prohibition of the Treaty of Versailles – the Reichswehr leadership ordered the acquisition of 200 military aircraft by 1937, with which 22 training squadrons were to be established.¹⁵

¹¹ Terraine, page 10;

¹² Colvin, page 121;

¹³ Poturzyn, page 22;

¹⁴ Topitsch, pages 159 and 167;

¹⁵ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page 402

Armaments of the Land Forces

The German Reich, bordering ten neighboring states, relies primarily on its military forces for defense. The relative strength of its own ground troops compared to those of all neighboring states is of particular importance. With the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany can initially expect its neighboring countries to "reduce their national armaments to the minimum level compatible with national security."

At least that's what eight out of ten neighboring states pledged in Article 8, Part I of the Treaty of Versailles. This would make the reduction of the German army to 100,000 men and 10 divisions bearable. However, the incursions into German territory by Poles, French, Belgians, and Lithuanians up to 1924 already demonstrate that a large state like Germany cannot be protected with only 10 army divisions.

Even after the completion of Germany's reduction of weapons and troops in 1927, the victorious powers had no intention of fulfilling their obligations under the Treaty of Versailles. Just as the British and Japanese maintained their navies and the French their air force, almost all neighboring states had no intention of reducing their land forces to the promised "minimum." These states disarmed only to the extent they deemed compatible with their national security.

The concept of a "minimum" force is no longer in question. France, with its army reduced to 700,000 soldiers, still feels threatened by Germany's 100,000-strong army. It therefore supplements its own security expenditures with loans for arms purchases and military advisors to a ring of states bordering Germany. This results in these countries—Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia—maintaining oversized armies that are in no way commensurate with their size, population, or the capacity of their national budgets. With 100,000 German soldiers, France and its allied nations against Germany maintain a force of 1,923.

France	724,000 men,
Belgium	113,000 men,
Poland	275,000 men,
Czechoslovakia	140,000 men and
Lithuania	32,000 men. ¹⁷

This risky inferiority of 12 to 1 for the German Reich did not change during the course of the League of Nations Disarmament Conference in Geneva until 1934.

¹⁶ Nitti, pages 159 and 167 – According to Nitti, these are the figures reported to the League of Nations.

¹⁷ Statkus, table without page numbers.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, the 100,000 men in the German army still faced: 655,000 French, 66,000 Belgians, 298,000 Poles, 140,000 Czechs, and 32,000 Lithuanians. In addition, there was a further risk for Germany – albeit only later.

second line – 885,000 Soviet soldiers.¹⁹

From a German perspective, the situation is further complicated by the fact that, as a result of the Versailles Treaty, Germany has not maintained any reserve forces for 15 years without conscription. All of its neighboring states possess weapons and reservists with which their armies can be augmented in the event of war. In a comparison of "military strengths,"²⁰ Germany therefore fares significantly worse. The German 100,000 men are faced with a "military strength"²¹ compared to 4.5 million French, 3.2 million Poles, 1.3 million Czechs, 0.6 million Belgians, 0.15 million Lithuanians.²²

With this ratio of military strengths close to 100 to 1, to Germany's disadvantage, it is impossible to conduct German foreign policy. Adding to the disaster, which is expressed here in numbers, is the fact that the Treaty of Versailles prohibits the German army from possessing heavy artillery and tanks.

The German people and their Reichswehr were aware of this security situation in their country when Hitler became Chancellor in 1933. What the average German citizen thought at that time could apparently also be understood in England. On November 29, 1934, former British Prime Minister Lloyd George said before the House of Commons in London:

"The signatory powers of the Treaty of Versailles solemnly promised the Germans that they would disarm if Germany took the lead in disarmament. Germany has waited fourteen years for this promise to be kept. During this time, a number of decidedly peace-loving ministers have served in Germany, ministers who have never ceased to implore the major powers to finally take the fulfillment of their promise seriously. These German ministers have been ridiculed... Meanwhile, all countries,

¹⁸ v. Oertzen, page 248, *MilGeschichte USSR* Volume 1, page 71, gives the French army strength as 750,000 men in 19

Maser, page 137;

²⁰ War Strengths

²¹ v. Oertzen, page 248;

²² Statkus, table without page numbers

With the exception of England, they increased their war armaments and even granted loans to Germany's neighbors, who in turn used them to build enormous military organizations close to Germany's borders. Can we then be surprised that the Germans were ultimately driven to a revolt against this chronic deception by the great powers?" Lloyd George omits the fact that England also modernized its fleet.

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The Geneva disarmament negotiations up to 1933

On May 18, 1926, the League of Nations opened a preliminary conference in Geneva for the disarmament conference that was to follow the implementation of German troop and weapons reduction. In January 1927, the Inter-Allied Military Commission of the victorious powers determined that the German Reich had disarmed in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles. Now, the victors had to follow through with action.

The German delegation at the conference in Geneva is now demanding that the armed forces of the other states be reduced to a comparably low level.

The victorious powers involved are evidently realizing that they now have to act. On February 27, 1927, Belgian Foreign Minister Vandervelde told the conference: *"From now on, we face the following dilemma:*

Either the other powers must reduce their armies in relation to the German Reichswehr, or the peace treaty will become invalid and Germany will claim for itself the right to possess armed forces capable of defending the inviolability of its territory."

24

Four and a half years of preliminary conferences pass without even the slightest hint of a result being achieved. The victorious powers are still not prepared to disarm their own armies, air forces, and navies and to comply with the articles of the Treaty of Versailles. In many countries, however, rearmament continues unabated.

On February 2, 1932, the League of Nations Disarmament Conference began in Geneva without any preliminary agreement. Since the preliminary negotiations had already shown that no state was willing to reduce its armed forces to the level of the German Reich, Germany now proposed a medium level of armament for all. The exact level of this medium level would be negotiable. In the event that this too was not accepted, the Reich government demanded a unilateral adjustment of German troop strength to that of comparable European states.

²³ Bernhardt, page 151

²⁴ Domarus, Volume 1, page 508 [quote from Hitler's speech]

The weak Reichswehr is not merely an expression of Germany's lack of national sovereignty. Rather, it is the very real problem of inadequate self-defense capabilities. The invasions by the British, French, Belgians, Lithuanians, and Poles between 1920 and 1924, in the midst of the Treaty of Versailles, the still-unresolved Polish demands for Silesia, East Prussia, and Pomerania, and the 12:1 superiority of the French and their allies over Germany demonstrate to everyone in Germany, and especially within the Reichswehr, that a 100,000-man army is not a sustainable solution.

Even Germany's signatures on two treaties failed to spur the League of Nations' disarmament negotiations. In 1925, Germany and France concluded the Locarno Pact, a non-aggression pact in which the German government definitively renounced Alsace-Lorraine. In 1928, the German government also signed the Briand-Kellogg Pact, which outlawed the use of war. Neither of these measures could persuade France to relinquish its 7-to-1 military superiority over Germany.

When Austria and Germany agreed to a customs union in 1931, it became clear that military power, even after the First World War, did not serve solely for self-defense. France vetoed the planned customs union, invoking Article 48 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, which declared Austria's independence inalienable and thus permanently precluded Vienna's ability to form alliances. Austria and Germany, lacking significant military resources, had no chance of negotiating the customs union with France. France could block it at any time with its own military. Austria and Germany were unable to enforce their sovereign decision, which threatened no one, on their own. The German Reich government, with the limited resources of the Reichswehr, was neither capable of protecting its own territory nor of conducting a sovereign foreign policy.

From February to June 1932, negotiations took place at the League of Nations without yielding the slightest results. Agreement could not be reached on the categories of weapons to be discussed, nor on the definition of an "attack." The proposal to establish the League of Nations' own troops also died as quickly as it had been conceived. France, in particular, blocked the conference. Despite Germany's final recognition of France's borders, despite British and Italian guarantees of France's territorial integrity, and despite the obligation under the Treaty of Versailles to disarm, France was firmly resolved in 1932 to prevent any adjustment of German troop strength. On the contrary, France wanted to be allowed to continue rearming at its own discretion.

The German Reich government now asserts that Germany has been a full member of the League of Nations since 1927. It points out that the League of Nations, as a democratic assembly, consists of members with equal rights, and

that it will therefore no longer accept any discriminatory special regulations that are intended to apply only to Germany.

In order to restart the negotiations which had previously failed due to France, US President Hoover introduced a new proposal on June 22, 1932.

He proposes reducing all land and naval forces by one third of their current size, scrapping all bombers, and outlawing bombing warfare.

The Soviet Union and Italy accepted it immediately. Great Britain postponed its decision, and France rejected the Hoover proposal outright. The Geneva conference on this plan from Washington ended after four weeks with a non-binding declaration that worldwide disarmament should take place. The final declaration was merely a label on an empty bottle.

For Germany, the round of negotiations in July 1932 was of particular importance. The German delegation attempted to secure recognition of equal rights for the German Reich in all matters relating to armaments. However, this failed.

Many other states wanted Germany to remain in a second-class status. Consequently, at the last meeting of this round, the head of the German delegation, the diplomat Nadolny, announced that Germany would not participate in further conferences and left Geneva.

The next round of negotiations takes place solely between France and the German Reich. On August 28, 1932, the German Foreign Minister von Neurath informs the government in Paris that, in his view, future disarmament agreements reached in Geneva must replace the Versailles arms limits for Germany. He makes it clear in the same note that

Germany, for its part, is prepared to renounce all weapons that all other powers are also renouncing. Von Neurath implies that

Germany, as a full member of the League of Nations, otherwise claims the right, like all other countries, to determine the size and armament of its own armed forces.

The German government was making every effort to make it easy for the French to make concessions. The following day, August 29, Foreign Minister von Neurath and Defense Minister von Schleicher presented the French ambassador in Berlin, François-Poncet, with a written summary of Germany's armament requests. They assured the Frenchman that the German Reich, once granted in principle equal rights, would only make use of them "to a limited extent." An additional troop contingent for the army and prototypes of the previously prohibited weapons would suffice.²⁵

On September 11, 1932, the French government responded with a rather harsh note. In it, it stated that all future negotiation results at the League of Nations would not alter the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

²⁵ François-Poncet, page 60 and Roos, Poland and Europe, page 50

could. Germany had also committed itself in Article 164 of the treaty to continue to observe the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles even at a later date, should it ever become a member of the League of Nations.²⁶ The reply from Paris robbed the Reich government in Berlin of its hitherto cherished belief that the problems of German security could be solved by diplomacy.

France is withdrawing from the formal interpretation of the Treaty of Versailles. It is making it clear to Germany that it is contractually trapped. According to the French view, membership in the League of Nations obligates Germany to uphold the Treaty of Versailles indefinitely. Essentially, France is thus showing defeated Germany a way out of its predicament. This way is withdrawal from the League of Nations and unilateral dissolution of the Treaty of Versailles, which the other states themselves do not want to uphold. The Locarno Treaties, with their German guarantee of Germany's western borders, were insufficient to persuade France to accept Germany's equal right to security. Six years of French obstruction in the League of Nations and at the Geneva disarmament negotiations are now forcing the German government to seek other avenues and methods.

Two days after the uncompromising reply from Paris, Foreign Minister von Neurath wrote to his British counterpart and President of the Geneva Disarmament Conferences that Germany would stay away from further talks "as long as the equality of rights has not been clarified." On September 28, 1932, the German delegation failed to appear in Geneva for the opening of the next round of meetings. The negotiations had thus effectively stalled. Now England and Italy were pressuring France to abandon its hard line. On September 11,

In December 1932, a breakthrough – albeit a small one – came. The governments of France, Great Britain, and Italy declared in a note,

"that Germany must be granted the same rights in a security system valid for all nations when the disarmament conference continues."

The major flaw of the note is the explicit remark *"that the modalities of applying such equality of rights still need to be discussed at the conference"*.

²⁷

Despite this drawback, it has now been conceded that the limits on arms and troop levels agreed upon at the League of Nations shall henceforth also apply to Germany, and that they shall replace the limitations in Part V of the Treaty of Versailles. With this British-French-Italian note of December 11, 1932, the first step towards breaking the "shackles of Versailles" has been taken.

However, the Polish government explicitly states that it does not recognize the equality now granted to Germany.²⁸

²⁶ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 135

²⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 137

²⁸ MGFA, DR and WW2, Volume 1, page 374

This is the foreign and security policy situation of the German Reich when Adolf Hitler became German Chancellor in January 1933. His accession to office was thus preceded by six and a half years of fruitless disarmament negotiations at the League of Nations. At that time, 15 years after the First World War, Germany was still incapable of defending itself. All opportunities to integrate the German Reich with acceptable treaties that could have set limits and boundaries to the inevitable expansion of the Reichswehr had thus far been squandered.

The secret defense preparations of the Reichswehr up to 1933

Alongside all the efforts of German foreign policy to restore the Reich's self-defense capability in agreement with the victorious powers, secret preparations are underway for a later reconstruction of German armed forces.

The secrecy is well-founded. The measures, intended to ensure the future security of the country, must not themselves become a pretext for a new war waged by the victors against a Germany that is no longer capable of defending itself.

In February 1924, the Reichswehr's Troop Office determined in an inventory that the ten divisions remaining in the Reich possessed only enough ammunition for approximately one hour of combat. The Troop Office's report on this matter concluded that, in the event of war, Germany would inevitably have to rely on the protracted resistance of the border population. The report concluded with the remark: *"Today and in the foreseeable future, the outbreak of war is only a matter of..."*

*heroic gesture"*²⁹.

At the same time, the Imperial Navy's fleet was far below the number of ships agreed upon in Versailles, and the German Reich was forbidden from possessing an air force.

Germany's inability to defend itself, the repeated invasions of German territory by foreign troops, and the questionable legitimacy of the imposed Treaty of Versailles led the Reich leadership to begin early on to prepare for the reconstruction of the German Reich's self-defense capabilities for the future. This was thwarted by the Treaty of Versailles, which, moreover, had to be promulgated as Reich law in July 1919. The treaty not only limited the size of the army and navy; it also prohibited Germans from possessing almost all modern weapons. Article 160 of the treaty further stipulated that the Reichswehr was to be used "exclusively for the purpose of..."

²⁹ MGFA, DR and WW2, Volume 1, page 374

The Reichswehr was to be used for "maintaining order within German territory and as border police." This meant nothing other than that the Reichswehr could not be called upon to defend the state's territory. Despite these restrictive clauses, it remains natural law and universally recognized international law that protecting one's own citizens from external threats is one of the constitutive tasks and duties of the state—even the defeated German state. Moreover, many of the victorious powers that had agreed to and concluded the Treaty of Versailles soon began to violate it themselves after the war. France, for example, occupied the Saar region with troops, and Poland broke the rules stipulated in the treaty for the plebiscite in Upper Silesia, which was still part of Germany. Thus, it soon became a consensus among broad sections of the population, and especially within the Reichswehr, that the well-being of one's own country was more important than the imposed treaty, which was not being upheld by the victors themselves. In this spirit, the Reichswehr leadership, and from 1927 onward the Reich government as well, attempted to safeguard the external security of the German Reich and its citizens. Rebuilding after the Treaty of Versailles.

However, part of the German reality of the 1920s was that, within the hopelessly divided political landscape of the then-unconsolidated republic, there were also forces skeptical of or even hostile to the Reichswehr, and who condemned and fought against violations of the Treaty of Versailles. Therefore, a consensus among the entire German people against the treaty and in favor of the Weimar Republic's capacity for self-defense never materialized.

Preparations for the hoped-for rearmament initially took place in secret within the Reichswehr, then from 1927 under political control and responsibility, and were shielded from foreign attention until 1935. These preparations were multifaceted. They encompassed the development of modern weapons as well as the modern training of Reichswehr personnel. They also extended to the planning for the later expansion of the small 100,000-man army and navy, and for the hitherto prohibited development of German air forces. These preparatory works corresponded with the government's simultaneous diplomatic efforts to persuade the victorious powers at the Geneva disarmament negotiations to either disarm themselves or to permit Germany's rearmament in a limited capacity.

The clandestine preparations for the later reconstruction of the German armed forces naturally did not remain entirely hidden from the victorious powers. The consequences were frequent resentments among the victors and sanctions against the defeated Germans. The delayed evacuation of the so-called Cologne Zone in 1925 and other coercive measures taken by the victorious states against Germany were among the consequences of these secret defense preparations.

The secret defense preparations in the Reichswehr

Soon after the German defeat and the peace treaty that had seemingly been concluded, it became clear that the Treaty of Versailles did not guarantee Germany's security. The resurrected Poland, under French protection, began to annex German territory in Upper Silesia. Thus, the new Chief of the Army Command, General von Seeckt, found himself compelled as early as 1921 to consider the future reconstruction of German defense forces. On January 15, 1921, he appointed a small working group of officers from his Army Office, tasking them with investigating the means and possibilities for an "Eastern Border Defense."

Seeckt's considerations are based on three scenarios: the later softening of the Treaty of Versailles, the abrogation of the treaty, and an emergency situation in which Germany is attacked.³⁰ The first ideas about increasing the number of infantry divisions from 7 to 21 and the reintroduction of universal conscription are born here, twelve years before the future Chancellor Hitler takes them up.

In 1923, Seeckt commissioned another comprehensive and thorough investigation into the still unresolved question of external security. The result was a draft for a future **"Great Army"** capable of successfully defending Germany in a multi-front war. The draft, completed in 1925, envisioned an army that, in the event of war, would expand to 104 infantry, cavalry, and border guard divisions, comprising active and reserve units.³¹ At that time, the neighboring states, which had formed military alliances against the German Reich, possessed approximately 220 active and reserve divisions. The roughly one hundred German divisions available for defense were thus adequate, but in 1925, politically and economically completely unrealistic. The draft for the Great Army therefore did not progress beyond mere consideration and calculation. It is not a plan with binding commitments and fixed dates, even though it serves as a guideline for army development 15 years later.

In May 1926, the aforementioned preliminary negotiations for the disarmament of all European states began at the League of Nations and in Geneva. However, the German government had to acknowledge that the victorious powers—primarily France—lacked the willingness to disarm themselves. It could therefore expect that this would open up some leeway regarding Germany's troop strength. Thus, after two years of fruitless negotiations, in September 1928 the German High Command drafted a plan to supplement the ten active Reichswehr divisions with mobilization divisions in the event of an external attack, creating a **16-division army for defense**. The first equipment-

³⁰ Meyer-Welcker, pages 532f

³¹ Dirks-Janßen, pages 21 and 210

Equipment, ammunition and reservists for the reserve divisions are to be procured and trained by 1932.³²

Impressed by the large number of military forces in all neighboring countries and in light of the continued lack of results from the Geneva Disarmament Conference, Reichswehr Minister Groener expanded the plan for the 16-division army to **21 divisions** two years later.³³ In April 1930, Groener stipulated in a directive entitled "The Tasks of the Army" that the 10 peacetime divisions could only be supplemented by 11 mobilization divisions in the event of an attack by foreign states on the territory of the Reich. Even this number of military forces was very small compared to those maintained by Germany's neighbors even in peacetime.

In 1932, the planning figures for the 21-division army were specified more precisely twice. In the spring of 1932, Minister Groener issued the **second armaments program**, setting the **defense strength at 570,000 men** and the troops' ammunition reserves for a six-week deployment. On September 11, 1932, the French government put an end to the German pursuit of consensus.

Foreign Minister Barthou declared on behalf of France that all future negotiation results at the League of Nations in Geneva would have no impact on the Reichswehr's troop strength. The spirit of Franco-German rapprochement from the time of Foreign Ministers Briand and Stresemann had thus clearly died out and been exhausted by 1932. For the Reich government, this was unacceptable after six years of negotiations, given the still unabated high levels of armament in all neighboring states and also considering the numerous invasions by foreign troops since the First World War. It drew its conclusions and increased the peace agreement's scope to 100,000 troops.

Army size is to be increased to 175,000. This is to be achieved through a phased build-up until... 1938. The number of peacetime divisions was to remain unchanged.

Thus, the government under Reich Chancellor Franz von Papen had already cast off the first shackle of Versailles before Adolf Hitler became the new Chancellor in 1933. When Hitler assumed governmental responsibility a quarter of a year later, he initially continued Papen's rearmament policy in a measured way. This is one of the reasons why, in the early years of Hitler's rule in Germany, no one initially suspected that Hitler would one day pervert the purpose of the rebuilt Reichswehr.

The secret defense preparations of the Imperial Navy

Conditions in the Imperial Navy are not much different from those in the Army.

The fleet was limited to only 15,000 men and one [unit of measurement] under the Treaty of Versailles.

³² MGFA, DR and WW2, Volume 1, page 379

³³ MGFA, DR and WW2, Volume 1, page 384

A small number of ships were permitted: 8 battleships, 8 light cruisers, a few torpedo boats, and the necessary auxiliary vessels. New builds within the fleet's total tonnage, now limited to 144,000 tons, were not permitted again until 1922.

Germany, in its post-World War I situation, needed a fleet for two purposes. It had to be able to keep the sea lanes upstream of its ports open for the import of raw materials and foodstuffs, and it had to be able to protect the sea route in the Baltic Sea to East Prussia, which had now been separated by land, from disruption. Both tasks remained relevant despite the peace treaty. The vulnerability of imports by sea had been demonstrated by the British in 1919, when, despite the "freedom of the seas in peace and war" promised in Wilson's Fourteen Points,³⁵ they "helped" Germany sign the Treaty of Versailles by blockading German North Sea and Baltic Sea ports. The result was famine in Germany and Austria.

The second task for the fleet arose from the separation of East Prussia from the German Reich and from France's policy towards Poland. The Polish press, and presumably large segments of the Polish population, continued to lay claim to German territories they had demanded at Versailles but had not received in 1919: parts of Silesia, East Prussia, and Pomerania. After the Polish attempt to conquer Upper Silesia in 1921, such demands from Poland were taken quite seriously in Germany. However, Poland only became a major factor from a German perspective with the Franco-Polish military treaty of 1925, in which France committed itself to sending a French naval squadron to support Poland in the Baltic Sea in the event of a German-Polish conflict. The French promise to provide this support, regardless of the underlying cause of the conflict, was fatal for Germany. This was a quasi-offer even in the event that...

Poland launching an attack on East Prussia, Pomerania, or Silesia on its own initiative. Therefore, since the conclusion of the Polish-French military treaty, the naval strategy of the Reichsmarine has been geared towards the threat that could be posed by the French fleet, triggered by Poland. Thus, the Reichsmarine needs ships that are comparable to the French in both number and quality.

In 1928, the first major post-war ship construction project was commissioned: a 10,000-ton armored ship. The Treaty of Versailles permitted the replacement of ships 20 years old. The armored ship was laid down in 1930, thus beginning the replacement of the six capital ships from the Imperial era, which were by then 30 years old. In November 1932, Admiral Raeder, Chief of the Naval Command, presented a **"First Restructuring Plan for the Navy"** —parallel to the Army plan for the 175,000-man army. This plan included the later construction of an aircraft carrier and the commissioning of su

³⁴ including the reserve ships

³⁵ Point 2 of the 14 points

Ten, the construction of larger cruisers than permitted, the establishment of a naval air force, and a slight increase in personnel. Thus, even here, the shackles of Versailles were cast off before Hitler became Chancellor.

The secret preparations for the establishment of an air force

Possessing an air force has been forbidden to Germany since the Treaty of Versailles. The secret preparations for the later development of an air force after the First World War were rather modest. From 1926, the victorious powers permitted the German Reich to build civilian aircraft and allow a strictly limited number of Reichswehr officers to participate in air sports. Through this, and through the German-Soviet cooperation at the Lipetsk airfield in Russia (described later), industry gained experience in military aircraft construction, and the Reichswehr began training pilots. From 1929, the Army Ordnance Office ventured into military aircraft construction, defying the victors' prohibition. It issued a tender for the design of a short-range reconnaissance aircraft, a long-range reconnaissance aircraft, a fighter aircraft, and a bomber.³⁶ The prototypes from this tender were sent to Lipetsk for testing. **In 1930**, the Chief of the Army Command established an **"aviation armament project"** for the period from 1931 to 1937. The plan still only envisions air squadrons for army support and no air force as a new third branch of the armed forces. With this interim step, Germany is also breaking free from the prohibitions of Versailles.

Secret preparations in the general military

Preparations for normal times in the future are not limited to plans for establishing reserve divisions for defense purposes and building more modern ships for a larger fleet. They consist primarily of modernizing Germany's defense system in all its branches.

Thus, Reichswehr non-commissioned officers received a high level of training that prepared many of them for future officer roles. In the large army of the later Wehrmacht, many of them would constitute a significant proportion of the lower officer corps. Reichswehr officers, too, were prepared for higher command positions, leading units and large formations that did not yet exist in the Reichswehr. In this way, the small 100,000-man army built up the officer corps of the later, much larger Wehrmacht.

German-Soviet cooperation belongs in the same context.

In 1922, parallel to their Treaty of Rapallo, the German Reich and the Soviet Union concluded a secret agreement on limited cooperation between the Reichswehr and the Soviet Army. As a result of this agreement, German officers were trained as pilots in Lipetsk and as tank soldiers in Kama.

³⁶ Schliephake, page 26

This is prohibited in Germany. The Reichswehr can gain its first experience in Russia in the construction of modern armored vehicles and fighter aircraft.

Furthermore, German officers, engineers and companies, who want to contribute to the defense capabilities of their own country, are developing prototypes for modern weapons, which are still prohibited in Germany, both at home and abroad.

The weapons were always manufactured abroad, often by joint ventures. The new weapons were then sold to the armed forces in the country of manufacture, and sometimes to third countries as well. The finished products never benefited the Reichswehr in Germany itself, but the knowledge gained from their development and construction certainly did. And equally important were the experiences of the participating companies for later industrial production in Germany from 1933 onward. Thus, in the 1920s and 30s, submarines based on German designs were developed and built in Spain, Finland, and the Netherlands, and some were subsequently purchased by the navies of other countries.³⁷

German bombers were developed in England, flying boats in Spain, and reconnaissance aircraft in the USA. Some of these newly developed aircraft were then put into licensed production by Mitsubishi and Kawasaki in Japan.³⁸

The modernization of the military in defeated Germany received further important impetus from abroad in the 1920s and 30s. While the Reichswehr leadership had to account for its military impotence at home and develop defensive strategies to protect the Reich, the thoughts and ideas of experts elsewhere were taking entirely new directions. There was General Douhet in Italy with a modern doctrine for air warfare. There were Colonels Fuller in England, de Gaulle in France, Generals Eimannsberger in Austria, and Tukhachevsky in the Soviet Union, who were envisioning the mobile warfare of the future. Young Reichswehr officers took up what was being written elsewhere and further developed these land and air warfare strategies for their own future. This was important groundwork for the later reconstruction of a German Wehrmacht. Thus, precisely during the years of near-total defenselessness, the qualities were formed in the German Reich that would initially make the Wehrmacht far superior to the armies of other nations in 1939. These are the leadership skills of the officer corps and non-commissioned officers, the know-how of the industry, and a modern concept for leadership, armaments, and structure.

After 1945, those indicted as war criminals in Nuremberg were accused of having worked towards a new world war even before Hitler's time. Former Reich Chancellor Wirth, Chancellor from 1921-22 and Reich Chancellor from 1929-31, was among those accused.

³⁷ Dessen, page 79

³⁸ Kens/Novarra, page 16

minister, testifying as a witness to this period before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg's response to this allegation:

*"All German governments between 1918 and 1933 and the German High Command were driven by concern for the survival of the Reich, which they saw as threatened both domestically and internationally. Already in the first years after the First World War, Poland had repeatedly attempted to forcibly separate parts of the Reich's territory. The fear of further attacks was not unfounded. Polish nationalist circles demanded further territorial cessions. ... Meanwhile, the armament of our Reichswehr was woefully inadequate. ... Chancellor Dr. Brüning and Reichswehr Minister Groener therefore decided to evacuate Silesia in the event of a Polish attack. Anyone who, in light of this fact, still claims that we had any intentions of attacking is to be pitied. ... Given the deplorable situation on Germany's eastern borders, it was only natural that we looked around to see how we could improve the situation from a military policy perspective."*³⁹

Hitler and the Geneva disarmament negotiations up to 1934

On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler became the new German Chancellor. He resumed the talks of the Geneva disarmament negotiations as quickly as possible, although initially without demanding more troops or additional weapons for the German Reich.

In March 1933, six weeks after Hitler's rise to power, British Prime Minister MacDonald presented a new proposal to the Geneva Disarmament Conference. According to this proposal, Germany would be allowed an army of 200,000 men. France would reduce its land forces to 200,000 soldiers in Europe plus 200,000 in its colonies. The proposal called for 200,000 troops for Italy in mainland Europe and another 50,000 in its colonies. MacDonald planned for 500,000 troops for the Soviet Union, 200,000 for Poland, and 100,000 for Czechoslovakia. A key part of the proposal was that

France, England, Belgium, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland would be allowed to maintain air forces, but Germany would not. All affected nations except Italy and France agreed to the McDonald proposal.

Italy demands more troops for its colonies, and France rejects the proposal outright.

These days, everyone is wondering how the new German Chancellor will react to the offer from England. On May 17, 1933, Hitler gives his official answer to the British Prime Minister in a government statement before the Reichstag:

³⁹ Defense Document Book 2a on the Krupp Trial, No. 47

"... The German Reich government sees the English plan as a possible basis for resolving these issues. ... Germany essentially agrees to a five-year transition period for establishing its national security, in the expectation that after this time Germany will achieve true equality with the other states. ...

Furthermore, the German government will not reject a weapons ban as too restrictive if it is applied in the same way to other states."

40

Almost simultaneously, the newly elected US President Roosevelt appealed to 44 heads of state in a peace message, urging them to completely abolish all offensive weapons such as bombers, tanks, and motorized heavy artillery. Hitler responded to Roosevelt's offer in the Reichstag speech already quoted: *"The proposal of the American President Roosevelt, which I learned of last*

night, therefore obliges the German government to express its warmest thanks. It is prepared to agree to this method for resolving the international crisis. ... Germany is at any time ready to renounce offensive weapons if the rest of the world does the same." Hitler, like his predecessors, demanded equal treatment for Germany.

He granted the other states a five-year transition period and, at the same time, rejected the idea that only Germany should be prohibited from possessing air forces. In the event that Germany should not be treated equally despite the French-British-Italian declaration of December 11, 1932, Hitler already announces the possibility of a German withdrawal from the League of Nations.

Hitler's reaction is considered appropriate in Germany. Six and a half years of fruitless disarmament negotiations have left the impression that the League of Nations is an unsuitable forum for initiating the promised disarmament of the victorious powers—especially France. Moreover, Germans still remember how their own country, as victor, dealt with defeated France 48 years earlier. France had instigated, declared, started, and lost the war of 1870. Nevertheless, the German occupation troops withdrew just two years after France's defeat, and no restrictions were imposed on the defeated French regarding their weapons, army, and navy. For this reason, too, every reasonably historically informed German citizen, 15 years after the First World War, considers France's hardline stance completely excessive and approves of Hitler's demand for appropriate and equal security for Germany.

⁴⁰ Domarus, Volume 1, pages 276 f

What Hitler said on the international stage was innocuous and gave no indication that he would start a war six years later. Even the Reichswehr's general staff, who had followed the Geneva negotiations and were aware of the troop strengths of all of Germany's neighboring states, had no reason, with any degree of realism, to conclude from Hitler's reaction to the MacDonald and Roosevelt proposals that anything more was at stake than Germany's self-defense. Even the 200,000 soldiers offered to Berlin, after the disarmament of all neighboring countries, would amount to less than a third of the combined forces of Germany's allies: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, and France. Experts considered a third of Germany's troop strength and armament to be the minimum requirement for a defense with any prospect of success. This also explains why the Reichswehr leadership refused to accept Germany unilaterally relinquishing its air force. From this perspective, it is obvious that the generals initially took Hitler's negotiating position in Geneva and his armaments policy for granted.

In a speech Hitler delivered to the commanders of the Reichswehr on February 3, 1933, having just assumed office, he emphasized his intention to rebuild the Reichswehr. The fact that he also spoke in this speech of the new "living space in the East" that Germany's rapidly growing population would need in the future should have served as a warning to the generals. However, the topic of "living space in the East" was so vague and unspecific in this early Hitler speech that the warning went unheeded. For a long time afterward, the issue of living space in the East was no longer a topic of discussion for Hitler before the generals. The significance of this February 1933 speech will be revisited in the following chapter of the book.

The reaction of most states to Hitler's government declaration of May 15, 1933, regarding the British and American proposals for disarmament and rearmament, was decidedly positive and optimistic. Nevertheless, the MacDonald proposal proved utterly ineffective. France complained about the SA units already present in Germany and disagreed with the proposed 200,000 soldiers for the German army. It objected to the British naval superiority and wanted to have a say in the negotiations regarding fleet strength. France was not satisfied with 400,000 soldiers and, moreover, demanded that a control system for monitoring all disarmament be tested before any disarmament began. Given the experience the Inter-Allied Control Commission had just gained over seven years of monitoring German disarmament, this French demand was nothing more than a transparent stalling tactic.

Despite Hitler's initially moderate political rhetoric, suspicion arose immediately in many parts of the world abroad. The head of the English delegation at the de-

⁴¹ SA is an abbreviation for Sturmabteilung (Storm Detachment), a militant branch of the NSDAP (Nazi Party).

The Geneva Armaments Conference sent a scathing report to London as early as May 1, 1933, in which the author, an army general, lamented the shift in national sentiment among the Germans. He listed the German "misdeeds": the establishment of a Reich Labor Service, the construction and possession of 125 military aircraft, the militarization and arming of police forces, and so on. The reporter stated as early as May 1933, barely after the Reichswehr had begun reconstruction, that this posed a threat to neighboring states. He demanded the enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles and concluded the report with his judgment of Germany: *"There's another rabid dog running around out there. We must stand together resolutely and either destroy it or lock it up until the disease is over."*

43

The report, with a favorable endorsement from Under-Secretary of State Vansittart at the Foreign Office in London, is distributed to the departments of the House.

When the round of negotiations on the McDonald Plan ended without result on June 5, 1933, the head of the German delegation, Nadolny, declared that unless negotiated results were achieved within another year, Germany would take the liberty of rearming itself without any further contractual basis. In plain terms, this meant that the victorious powers had to commit themselves to disarmament by the summer of 1934, or Germany would rearm.

In January 1934, Adolf Hitler demanded a troop strength of 300,000 soldiers for the Reichswehr from the negotiating partners in Geneva. The British government then attempted to mediate between France and Germany and proposed a figure between 2,000 and 300,000 men for Germany. Hitler accepted the compromise. France rejected it. French Foreign Minister Barthou demanded that colonial troops be excluded from disarmament, from which Germany would gain no advantage, and he insisted that SA units be included in the German troop count. Furthermore, Barthou insisted that the provisions of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles remain binding for Germany, even if the disarmament negotiations should result in a different outcome.

Now it is Hitler again who makes significant concessions to France. He offers to completely disarm and demilitarize the SA.⁴⁴ He is satisfied with an air force that should not exceed 50% of the French one. He declares Germany's renunciation of bomber aircraft if an agreement is reached with France. And Hitler accepts the French wish to disarm the German troops.

⁴² Reich Labor Service. Compulsory service for young men and women from the age of 18, consisting of 6 months of civilian work, was introduced in 1935; from 1939, this also included fortification construction.

⁴³ (Documents: British Foreign Policy, Second Series, Volume V, Document 127) The SA was already a

⁴⁴ thorn in Hitler's side in 1934. It was becoming increasingly paramilitary and was withdrawing [something - likely a reference to a specific group or organization] to his influence

to allow the other states to begin only after a period of five years.⁴⁵ Italy has now agreed to the British compromise proposal, but France is not giving in.

On April 17, 1934, Barthou rejected the British mediation proposal and the German concessions with an official note. It stated that *"the French government solemnly*

refuses to agree to German rearmament," that "German rearmament renders all negotiations futile," and that "France will henceforth guarantee its security by its own means."

46

Four days later, the English politician Lloyd George commented on the Barthou note before the House of Commons in London. He said the reaction from Paris stemmed from the fact that

"France has refused for years, if not longer, to fulfill its obligation to disarm, and has increased its armaments year after year even after Locarno."

47

Following the Barthou Note of April 1934, the Geneva disarmament negotiations definitively failed. France declared that it would no longer base its national security on limiting the armaments of all states, but solely on the strength of the French army. This marked the beginning of a new arms race in Europe.

The opportunity for the victors of 1918 to integrate postwar Germany through universally accepted arms control treaties has been squandered. France's paranoia about Germany and its greed for its own importance have even opened the floodgates that France had wanted to keep closed. Germany has demanded its self-defense capability and, in return, offered limitations on troop numbers and weapons.

Only one such German offer was accepted by the British in 1935: the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, in which the German government limited the strength of the Reichsmarine to 35% of the Royal Navy. The agreement held until shortly before the outbreak of war, when the British supported the Poles in the Danzig question.

⁴⁵ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 3, page 156

⁴⁶ Rassinier, page 83

⁴⁷ Rassinier, page 83

The arms race from 1933 onwards

In 1933 and the years that followed, four events triggered a new wave of armaments in Europe, America, and Asia. The first was two significant changes of government occurring almost simultaneously. In Germany and the USA, two politicians who understood armaments as a tool of their foreign and economic policy took power at the beginning of 1933. The second was the German demand in Geneva that all states—as agreed—reduce their troops, and the announcement that Germany, if nothing were to happen, would rearm the Reichswehr a year later. The third event was a package of compromise proposals from Washington and London regarding upper limits on the number of weapons, which the German government accepted, but which France categorically rejected. The fourth momentous event was France's reaction to Germany's beginning rearmament: Barthou's declaration that "France will henceforth guarantee its security with its own means." With that, all the floodgates were open.

Naval armament 1933 to 1939

German naval armament, although insignificant in terms of actual quantities, is presumably one of the reasons why Great Britain sided with Poland in 1939, declared war on the German Reich, and escalated this war in just two days from a local conflict over Danzig and the "Corridor" into a world war. For this reason, naval armament will be discussed first and in detail.

The German naval buildup after Hitler's rise to power reflects two distinct developments and changes. One is the arms race that the major maritime powers had already begun. The other is a shift in Hitler's foreign policy towards Great Britain in 1937. Until then, the dictator had sought to win England's partnership through maritime self-restraint. When this proved unsuccessful, he attempted to force British partnership, or alternatively neutrality, by means of a large fleet.

First, let's look at what was happening worldwide. In 1932, the ten-year moratorium on the construction of capital ships, stipulated in the Washington Naval Treaty, expired. During this period, the focus of naval armament for all nations had shifted to the modernization of their light naval forces. From 1932 onward, the major naval powers resumed laying the keels and building battleships, aircraft carriers, and cruisers.

In Germany, the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were still in effect at that time. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, the German Reichsmarine possessed heavy warships with a combined displacement of 104,000 tons. The Royal Navy of England, with its aircraft carriers, battlecruisers, and other vessels, was also among the most powerful at that time.

Together, they amount to 1,210,000 tons. That is almost twelve times as much. The French fleet, at 487,000 tons, is four and a half times the size of the German Imperial Navy.⁴⁸ The German Navy ranks seventh among the world's major fleets in terms of tonnage and the number of main battleships. At the outbreak of war, six years later, the German Navy will still hold seventh place despite its own rearmament. Only its ranking based on the number of submarines will have shifted slightly.

In early 1933, Roosevelt, the former Under Secretary of the Navy, became the new President of the United States. At that time, his country had 12.8 million unemployed people, a quarter of the working-age population. As one of his first acts in office, Roosevelt declared warship construction a job creation measure under the New Deal program and immediately had the US Congress approve the construction of two aircraft carriers and 20 destroyers, securing funding in the budget. In 1934, the next phase followed: an eight-year construction program of 120 ships. Thus, as early as 1933, the naval power of the USA was preparing to take military action against states such as Japan, the Soviet Union, Italy, or Germany in the still uncertain future, should they attempt to alter the status quo of global power.

England also began to increase the pace of shipbuilding again in 1931. The keels of two aircraft carriers were laid in 1934 and completed in 1936. Three more were launched in 1937 and another two in 1938. Otherwise, British production increased from 1936 onwards to two battleships, seven light cruisers, and seventeen destroyers per year.

In 1931, France decided to build a new and larger class of 26,000-ton battleships and included the funds for this in the budget.

Planning on page 52. Construction of the first ship of the new class, the "Dunkerque," began as early as 1932. From 1934 onward, France and Italy attempted to outdo each other in the size of their ships and to replace older vessels with new ones. However, their fleets did not grow in either tonnage or the number of ships.

From **1931**, the German Imperial Navy began replacing its 30-year-old line-class ships.⁵³ Admiral Raeder, the Chief of the Naval Command, still adhered to the total tonnage limit of 144,000 tons for the fleet stipulated in Versailles. However, he had the replacement ships designed somewhat larger than permitted for the respective ship classes under the Treaty of Versailles.

⁴⁸ Weyers 1934

⁴⁹ Program for Stimulating the American Economy Potter/Nimitz,

⁵⁰ page 472 Dreessen,

⁵¹ page 105 and Weyers Fleet Calendar 1939, pages 416ff The largest

⁵² French battleships to date had a displacement of 23,500 tons. The English

The battleship HOOD, however, already had a displacement of 42,000 tons.

⁵³ Today, large container ships are scrapped after about 15 years.

Raeder believes this breach of contract is justified in light of the ever-larger ships in foreign fleets and considering the many violations of the Treaty of Versailles.

to be able to take responsibility for the victors⁵⁴. Admiral Raeder's **"1st Shipbuilding Replacement Plan"** is designed to last until 1946. By 1933, 3 new ships will be laid down, in France during the same period ⁸¹⁵⁵.

At that time, Germany's maritime security interests were primarily focused on France and the Soviet Union. Despite all Franco-German treaties, the French government pursued a distinctly anti-German course in its other alliances and in the League of Nations disarmament negotiations. And Russia was the potential adversary that, in a crisis, could cut off German iron ore and pit prop imports on the Baltic Sea. When the victorious powers still refused to comply with their Versailles disarmament obligations in 1932, and when the disarmament negotiations from February to September proved fruitless, the German Reich government drew its own conclusions from the victors' breach of the treaty. It decided to roughly match the size of the Reichswehr to that of the French armed forces in Europe. This meant a fourfold increase in the size of the Reichsmarine.

Thus, in October 1932, the **"First Reconstruction Plan of the Reichsmarine"** was drawn up, according to which it was to grow to the size of the French fleet within the following six years. The Reichsmarine would then have ships totaling approximately 480,000 tons in its inventory, under construction, and in planning. This, too, was a clear breach of the Treaty of Versailles, which had already been frequently violated by the victorious powers. The new plan was initially kept secret from the victorious powers and the League of Nations for fear of retaliation. The Reichsmarine's operational plans from 1925, which were still in effect, envisioned two options: the defense of the Baltic Sea approaches against French squadrons and the protection of its own maritime supply lines from French ships.⁵⁶

1933–1934

When Admiral Raeder visited Adolf Hitler soon after his inauguration in February 1933

When Raeder presents the details of his first rebuilding plan, he objects.⁵⁷ Hitler seeks a compromise with Great Britain and, if possible, its alliance. Therefore, in his view, his own naval armament must not send the wrong signal to England. Despite this Hitler veto, the French navy initially remains Raeder's benchmark. When it becomes known in June 1934 that Italy intends to lay the keels of two capital ships of 35,000 tons with even larger guns than previously seen, and the rumor follows that France intends to follow suit, Raeder also plans in that direction.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Raeder also uses a new calculation basis for ships that has been internationally recognized since 1922. sizes that include the "standard displacement"

⁵⁵ Salewski, page 116

⁵⁶ Salewski, page 136

⁵⁷ Raeder, Volume 1, pages 280 f

⁵⁸ Salewski, page 142

For the years in which the German fleet was still outnumbered by the French, Raeder developed a naval strategy concept designed to negate the French advantage.⁵⁹ In the future, the Reichsmarine was not only to protect its own sea lanes and the Baltic Sea from the French fleet. At the same time, in the event of war, it was to use heavy ships to disrupt and—where possible—interrupt French supplies and troop transports across the Atlantic. This Atlantic capability required larger ships, creating a race to the bottom in the arms race for ever more powerful warships.

1935

In January 1935, Hitler first expressed to a member of the British House of Lords his willingness to limit the German Navy to 35% of the Royal Navy's strength. Britain saw the benefit of this offer and accepted, even though the 35% limit for Germany violated the Treaty of Versailles, which Britain considered still valid. On June 18, 1935, a "German-British Naval Agreement" was signed by both sides. The treaty limited the German naval strength in all ship classes to 35% of the British strength. For submarines, the limit was set at 45%, which could later be increased to 100% if Germany relinquished tonnage in other ship classes.

At that time, England's naval buildup had to balance the naval rivalry between Italy in the Mediterranean and Japan in the Pacific. London was therefore relieved to at least have its back clear against the German Navy in the Atlantic. The British weren't interested in anything more, especially not a partnership with Germany. In this respect, Hitler was mistaken about the effect he had hoped for from the treaty.

Following the conclusion of the naval agreement, the naval command in Berlin replaced the first reconstruction plan of 1932 in November with a **"Draft for a Shipbuilding Replacement Plan,"** which stipulated a construction program until 1946. The new plan reduced the planned ship tonnage from 480,000 tons to approximately 420,000.

With the now contractually stipulated 35% of the Royal Navy, the Reichsmarine – in theory – has parity with France, which itself, according to the naval agreements of 1922 and 1930, was previously only permitted to maintain 35% of England's fleet strength. However, this parity remains fictitious until the outbreak of war, because France's fleet exists and Germany's battle fleet is never built.

In 1935, another British attempt to halt their naval arms race with their rivals failed. They convened a third naval conference in London. There, the Japanese demanded the same size fleet as the USA.

⁵⁹ Rahn, page 90

They refuse to accept this, yet demand the same naval strength as Great Britain. England wants to build more cruisers and destroyers, but in reduced sizes, which would then apply to all. Italy wants to achieve unconditional parity with France. However, France refuses to include its ships in the colonies or those in the Atlantic in the fleet comparison. Thus, the conference ends with a compromise agreement: limits on tonnage and armament for certain classes of ships.

The link between the size of the German navy and the British navy means that the 35% for Germany is a measure of growth, because the British are continuing to arm themselves. Nevertheless, the naval command did not adhere to the agreed-upon limits on growth. In its quest to possess ships that were equal to the French in naval battles, almost all plans for the new armored ships and cruisers exceeded the stipulated maximum tonnage figures. When Raeder had the Naval Design Department take stock of the battleship construction at the end of 1935, he realized that he had far exceeded the planned targets and that if construction continued, the agreed-upon tonnage would be exceeded in 1938 or 1939, thus violating the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. Despite this, the admiral did not put the brakes on the arms buildup. Only the shortage of steel, shipyards, and money ensured that the German Navy never exceeded 35% of the Royal Navy's tonnage.⁶⁰ The only exception to this, from the beginning of the war, were the submarines laid down. Thus, Raeder's breach of the agreement remained a malicious intent lacking the power to carry it out.

1936 – 1937

In 1936, 1937, and 1938, Hitler began to realize that his hopes regarding England were misplaced. The government in London had scrapped the naval agreement and—from the German perspective—offered nothing in return. Hitler's vision for the distant future revolved around a partnership with England in which the British, as a naval power, would remain the undisputed rulers of their global empire, and in which Germany, as a land and air power, would exert its dominance in an economic sphere or group of states in Southeast Europe. Hitler also long believed that the rivalries and problems Great Britain faced worldwide with France, the Soviet Union, the USA, Japan, and Italy would make Germany, with its respectable fleet, an attractive ally. Thus, he pursued a dual strategy with the 35% limit on the German fleet. This self-imposed restriction was intended, on the one hand, to appease England, and on the other hand, the still considerable size of the navy was meant to make the German Reich an attractive partner. At least the USA was preparing to displace England as the leading naval power, and in the Soviet Union, Stalin ordered in 1935 the construction of a battle fleet by 1947 that would rival the fleets of America and England.

⁶⁰ Dressen, page 297

is of equal standing. A German junior partner at sea could therefore be important for the British in the future.

Hitler's efforts in 1936 to conclude pacts with England's rivals – namely Japan and Italy – were also attempts to persuade the British to finally seek friendship with Germany.

1938

In the spring of 1938, Hitler realized that he was clearly failing in this endeavor. In May, he told Admiral Raeder that he had to expect England to be on the opposing side in future conflicts, just as it had been in the First World War, siding with France. From this point on, Hitler's assessments of the British reaction fluctuated. On the one hand, he frequently told generals that England would certainly not tolerate any further rise of Germany. On the other hand, he asserted before each subsequent event—the Anschluss of Austria, the annexation of Czechoslovakia, and the attack on Poland—that he was right, and on one occasion, wrong.

—, that he is certain that England will not budge – with which he says twice

For Raeder, armed conflict at that time was not theoretically far-fetched. The revision of Germany's eastern border with Poland, the return of Memel, and the fate of the Sudeten Germans under foreign rule were still unresolved issues that could lead to a war with France or Poland. According to Hitler's new calculations, not only France's Allies, Poland, the Soviets, and Czechoslovakia would be on the list of potential enemies, but now also Great Britain. The consequences were disastrous.

In the autumn of 1938, Anglo-German relations deteriorated noticeably when Hitler threatened to wage war, if necessary, to secure the return of the Sudeten Germans. Although England agreed to the annexation of the Sudetenland at the Munich Conference, just five days later, on October 5, 1938, the House of Commons in London doubled the defense budget from 400 to 800 million pounds sterling.⁶¹

The events in Munich have turned the mood of the British towards Germany around.

At that time, another problem was simmering. In the past two years, the Soviet Union's submarine armament had reached a scale that posed a lurking danger to German import routes in the Baltic Sea and ferry connections to the still-isolated East Prussia.⁶² To counter this threat, the Reich government invoked a clause in the Anglo-German Naval Treaty that allowed it to increase the total tonnage of the German submarine fleet to match that of the British, after prior notice, regardless of the number of boats. The Reich government directed

⁶¹ Rassinier, page 214

⁶² Weyers, Volumes 1937-1939

In December 1938, a corresponding request was sent to England.⁶³ The British government attempted to dissuade the German government from this step and dispatched Admiral Cunningham, Chief of Staff of the Admiralty, to Berlin on December 30 to persuade the Germans to proceed with the U-boat expansion slowly and in stages. Hitler rejected this. Cunningham commented on the futile mission with the remark:

*"It was perfectly clear that the war could not be postponed indefinitely and that Britain would be drawn into it."*⁶⁴

Since Cunningham speaks not of preventing but of postponing, and since one can only postpone what one can influence oneself, it cannot be ruled out from this comment by the Admiral that he believes England must put an end to the German naval buildup itself with a war, into which it should, however, allow itself to be "drawn in".

In light of the new tensions with England, but before the Cunningham visit, Admiral Raeder establishes a planning committee in October 1938 to examine the consequences of this unfortunate development: their own measures in the event of a war with the naval power England.

The committee recommends avoiding an open naval battle with the Royal Navy at all costs. The German Navy, at best, has a vague chance of disrupting British overseas communications through a cruise war on the high seas. However, the outcome of such a war remains entirely uncertain. The Naval High Command's planning committee also mentions the possibility that, given the German threat at sea, the British might be more inclined towards a peaceful settlement than risk the security of their overseas connections in a war with Germany.⁶⁵ The Naval High Command, and Raeder at its head, therefore plan to disrupt England's supply lines in the event of war. They do not intend to wage war against England over its global empire.

In November 1938, Raeder presented the results of this investigation to Hitler. He proposed accelerating the further expansion of the navy to circumvent British countermeasures. However, Hitler suddenly disagreed with the previously planned size of the fleet. He demanded even faster and more powerful battleship construction than Raeder considered appropriate. After an argument in which the admiral requested his resignation—which Hitler refused—Raeder, ignoring the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, ordered the design of a high seas fleet intended to fight for Britain's supply lines at sea in the event of war. Following two draft plans, "Plan X" and "Plan Y," in the autumn and winter of 1938, the Navy-

⁶³ Potter/Nimitz page 465

⁶⁴ Güth, page 152

⁶⁵ Rahn, page 92

Hitler presented the so-called **"Z-Plan"** for a new, large fleet in January. It encompassed a navy of gigantic proportions for Germany, totaling **1,654,395 tons** , with 10 battleships and 15 armored ships, 3 aircraft carriers, 43 cruisers, 87 destroyers, and 249 submarines, which were to be available from 1947 onwards. At Hitler's insistence, the planned completion date was then brought forward **to 1945** .

1939

With the leap from the "Draft for a Shipbuilding Replacement Plan" of November 1935, which envisioned a total tonnage of 475,000 tons by 1946, to the "Z-Plan" with its over 1.6 million tons by 1945, the German Navy made a planning leap of 1 to 3. However, this leap never lived up to its fatal intention. The German Reich lacked shipyards, steel, and money. At the beginning of 1939, before the leap, the German Navy's tonnage stood at only 200,311 tons. The relative strength of the German fleet and the

France and England's score is still 1 to 2 to 668.

Although the Z-Plan is a gigantic project, it is not based on any new strategic idea. The naval command is still considering a cruiser and submarine war, intending to retaliate in kind against the usual British blockade in the event of war. And Hitler offers no reasons beyond his fear of British intervention in any further revisions of the territorial losses imposed by Versailles.

With the Z-Plan, Hitler and the naval leadership planned to exceed the tonnage allocated to them under the 1935 Naval Agreement for 1945. However, this had not yet been communicated to England. In March, the British naval command, in accordance with its reporting obligations under the Naval Agreement, announced that the Royal Navy was to grow to almost 2 million tons by 1943. This would have allowed the German Navy to grow to almost 700,000 tons, more than German shipyards could have completed. But Hitler and the Admiral did not want to disclose the immense armament they were planning for 1945 to England. Hitler then resorted to the dubious measure of circumventing the 35% tonnage limit. He denounced the Anglo-German Naval Agreement at the next available opportunity.

In mid-March 1939, Hitler ordered the occupation of Czechoslovakia. In response, England offered Poland a guarantee against Germany. Hitler denounced this as an anti-German act and used the Polish-British treaty as a pretext to terminate the naval agreement. This released Germany from any obligation to adhere to upper limits in naval armament. However, instead of strengthening Germany's security through accelerated warship construction, Hitler gave England a guarantee against Germany.

⁶⁶ Dressen, page 151

⁶⁷ Dressen, pages 111-113, 151

⁶⁸ Dressen, pages 144f

a reason to halt the arms buildup by means of a new war. Thus, the British seized the next opportunity that Germany offered them: the German-Polish War in September 1939. On September 3rd, Great Britain declared war on the German Reich.

The Z-Plan and the termination of the Naval Agreement are the results of the same flawed calculation that Kaiser Wilhelm II and Admiral Tirpitz used before the First World War to gain British enmity instead of partnership. The expansion of the navy according to the Z-Plan—though gigantic—was intended as a strategically defensive measure, even though its completion would have given the Reich the capability to become offensive in naval warfare. Hitler still wanted to avoid war against his "preferred partner," England, in 1939. Admiral Raeder also repeatedly warned Hitler against a war with England, at that time still the greatest naval power in the world.

Raeder foresees that the industrial and naval power USA will side with England in a British-German conflict. He knows that such a war would end in catastrophe for Germany, and yet he himself sets this trap for Germany with his Z-Plan.

On September 1, 1939, at the outbreak of war, Germany's naval buildup had not altered the ranking of the largest fleets since 1933. The Kriegsmarine still ranked seventh worldwide in terms of tonnage and number of ships. All other fleets had also grown. In terms of total tonnage, Great Britain led, and in terms of the number of ships, the United States.

England, leading the table with 1,370,927 tonnes, sets the benchmark for comparison. The USA follows in second place with 92.2% of the British tonnage. France occupies fourth place with 39%, and Germany is in seventh place, now with 240,315 tons, or 17.5% of British tonnage. A tabular comparison of the number of large ships in the navies shows that in 1939 Germany was still far from being capable of "achieving world domination." The Nuremberg prosecutors accused Admirals Raeder and Dönitz of harboring this intention in 1946.

Number of large warships on 1 September 1939: 69

Ship class	GB	USA	F	D
battleship	15	15	7	5
Aircraft carriers, heavy cruisers, light cruisers	7	5	1	-
destroyer	17	18	7	1
	48	18	12	6
Total per fleet	183 270	214 270	58 85	21 33

⁶⁹ Dressen, pages 132 and 144

The Kriegsmarine only caught up with the Royal Navy in terms of the number of submarines.

Number of submarines on September 1, 1939: 970

Ship class	SowjU	USA	F	GB	D
Submarines	165	95	77	57	57

At the outbreak of war in September 1939, the American and British navies had not yet reached their maximum strength. The effects of modernization in the British and American navies, following lengthy shipbuilding periods, only began to be felt in 1940 and 1941. Despite all the initial German naval successes, the naval war would be a battle fought with unequal weapons.

Conclusion

After the war, the Z-Plan served the Nuremberg Tribunal as the main piece of evidence against the vanquished, proving the guilt of Grand Admiral Raeder, Chief of the Naval Command, and his successor, Grand Admiral Dönitz, for having planned a war of aggression and striving for world domination with the large fleet. Besides the Z-Plan itself, official statements and speeches by Admirals General Carls and Boehm were also intended to support this evidence and accusation. In 1938 and 1939, these two admirals wrote and spoke about how "Germany must conquer the way to the ocean" and that "those who have hitherto been favored by history must be persuaded to come together and make room for another place in the sun."⁷¹ Neither Carls nor Boehm was part of the Naval Command. And just as Cunningham, Chief of Staff of the British Admiralty, did not officially speak for England, so the two admirals did not speak for Germany, even though all three likely reflected the opinions of many Britons and many Germans. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the difference between "world domination" and German "equality among the world powers." Even though the overall picture of armaments and foreign policy in the German Reich demonstrates Hitler's expansionist intentions toward Eastern Europe, naval armament is not an indication of similar ambitions overseas and for world domination. Hitler already reveals in his book "Mein Kampf" that he has no interest in naval supremacy or colonies. Hitler's ambitions are not directed against England and America, nor at their overseas possessions. For him, naval armament serves only to establish a "flank defense" on the seas for his ambitions in Eastern Europe. This applies both to the period of the German attack on neighboring Poland and subsequently to the blockade war with England, which itself became embroiled in war with Poland.

⁷⁰ Dressen, page 145

⁷¹ Rahn, pages 92 f

The same applies later to the attempt to intercept the flood of American war materiel destined for the Soviet Union in the North Atlantic. Hitler only considered exploiting England's colonial empire during the war, when he saw an opportunity to defeat the British.

With England and France's declaration of war on the German Reich on March 3rd... In September 1939, Germany's land and air war against Poland unexpectedly became a naval war. Wherever the British fleet could reach, it could land army and air forces. It would first do so in Norway in April 1940, forcing Germany to send troops there as well. It would do so repeatedly later in Greece and North Africa to support the states and colonies attacked by Italy. Here, too, Hitler, disregarding all his own objectives, would succumb to the pressure exerted by the naval power of Great Britain and send German troops to reinforce the unsuccessful Italian ally.

Thus, naval power indirectly determines the course of land power. In the long run, the threat posed to all European coasts by the British and American navies during World War II will necessitate the presence of German forces from the North Cape to Sicily. Therefore, the value of the Z-Plan and the termination of the Naval Agreement for Germany is minimal, while the political damage at the beginning and during the war is considerable.

German fleet plans and contracts

time	Plan or contract	planned Total tonnage	Target date
1919	Provisions of Versailles 1st	144,000	permanently
1931	Shipbuilding Replacement Plan	approximately 480,000	1942
Oct. 1932	1. Renovation plan	approximately 480,000	1942
June 1935	German-British Fleet agreement	420,000 on growth	permanently
November 1935	Design for a Shipbuilding replacement plan	475,000	1946
January 1939	Z-Plan	approx. 1,654,000	1948
Sept. 1939	Current status at Beginning of war	240,300	—

With its 240,300 tons, the German navy was eight times smaller than the fleets of England and France at the beginning of the war.

Germany's naval buildup from 1933 to 1939 was a reaction to the perceived threat level at each stage, initially directed at France and then at Great Britain. Both England and Germany consistently viewed the navies of other nations as a primary threat. The British feared for their global empire, the Germans for their vital maritime supply lines and the delivery of essential goods. Neither the British nor the German government was willing to acknowledge that their own fleet served as both a source of protection and a threat.

Air Force Armament 1933 to 1939

1933

At the turn of the year 1932-33, before Hitler became German Chancellor, the rearmament of the many air armies in Europe was still driven by the French-Italian rivalry around the Mediterranean, by France's general fear of Germany, and by England's fear of France's bomber fleet.

The aircraft inventories of the air forces at the time of Hitler's accession to power were approximately: – United States of America 3,100 military aircraft – France

– Great Britain	3,000
– Italy – Soviet Union	1,800
– Poland	1,700
– Czechoslovakia	1,700
– Belgium	700
– Germany	670
	350
	70

All aircraft numbers mentioned here and below are taken from 13 German, English, American, and Russian books on air armament, as well as from 9 different aviation journals from 6 nations. The books are listed in the bibliography, the journals are not. The figures in the various sources differ considerably, partly because reserve aircraft, which often constitute half of the total inventory, or aircraft in the colonies were either included or excluded. An attempt has been made here to derive the probable approximate figures from the various tables.

The nations allied with France against Germany are therefore more than 60 times superior in military machinery, although the German machines are still training aircraft or prototypes.

For the Reich government and the Reichswehr leadership in 1932 and 33, all concerns about their own security still focused on France, which continued to pursue anti-German policies despite the Franco-German treaties, and on Poland, where the voices calling for territorial expansion refused to be silenced.

Potential second-tier opponents include those allied with France.

The Belgians and Czechs. Thus, the German push for its own air force initially refers solely to these neighboring states and their offensive capabilities.

From February 1933 onwards, Adolf Hitler dictated the pace of armaments in the German Reich. His first offer at the disarmament negotiations in Geneva was that Germany would completely forgo air forces if all other countries did the same. Such a solution would be attractive for the still impoverished Germany. The other states rejected Hitler's proposal. Subsequently, the German Reich government attempted to legalize its secret decision of July 1932 to procure 200 military aircraft through negotiations.

In Geneva, Germany proposes that 500 fighter and reconnaissance aircraft be granted to Germany.⁷² This proposal makes no mention of bombers suitable for a war of aggression. The negotiating partners in Geneva reject the German demand for 500 military aircraft and are also unwilling, as announced in Versailles, to reduce their own air forces.

Since no concessions could be expected from the former victorious powers, the Reich government abandoned its seven-year-long, fruitless attempts to achieve an armaments balance by agreement. In May **1933**, the Reich Air Ministry developed the so-called **1000-Aircraft Program**, the plan for the 500 fighter and reconnaissance aircraft demanded in Geneva, plus an equal number of training aircraft.⁷³

On June 5, 1933, Ambassador Nadolny declared for the German Reich in Geneva – as already mentioned. —, that Germany would rearm from mid-1934 onwards, if the on- whose states do not commit to disarming themselves by then. At the end of June 1933, the two Reich Ministers for Aviation and Defense, Göring and von Blomberg, secretly ordered the establishment of an "air fleet" of 600 front-line aircraft by 1935.⁷⁴ Including training and reserve aircraft, this amounts to the aforementioned 1,000 aircraft.

As early as October 1933, the three chiefs of the British Navy, Army, and Air Force warned in their joint annual report of the potential rearmament of the German Reich. This warning formed the basis, among other things, for an "Air Force Expansion Plan for 1934," the first of seven more to be implemented by 1939. This early warning could only refer to the German demands made in Geneva. In October 1933, the delivery of military aircraft to the Reichswehr had not even begun.

⁷² People's Air Force, page 27;

⁷³ People's Documents, Volume 9, page 119;

⁷⁴ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page 476;

⁷⁵ People's Air Force, page 27

Although the German plan fell far short of matching the armament level of the Royal Air Force and still lagged considerably behind the French air force, the British began their arms race as early as 1933, before Germany had even properly begun. They would later always point out that it was the Germans who forced them to rearm.

The English historian Terraine wrote the following after the war:

"According to the general opinion of the Air Force High Command, there was no doubt that this rearmament was directed against Germany and solely against Germany."

⁷⁷

But in 1933, England was still thinking about the threat from its nearest continental neighbor, France. The English media mogul Viscount Rothermere wrote in his Daily Mail on November 7, 1933:

"We need 5,000 warplanes if we don't want to lose our [military] forever."

Neighbors should remain at the mercy of fate. France could conquer England today without laying a single soldier on our side.

to land on coasts or without fighting a single naval battle."

France, the strongest air power in Europe in 1933, was also modernizing its arsenal. In December 1933, the French government decided to expand the "aircraft fleet of the 1st Air Force." to renew the line by the beginning of 1937 with 1,010 modern military aircraft⁷⁸.

While other countries were taking action, in Germany, throughout the entire year 1933, there was still no outward sign of the development of a new air force. Pilots continued their training in the Soviet Union or at civilian facilities within the Reich. Industry was only just beginning to establish its production facilities for military aircraft, and there wasn't a single airbase or squadron in all of Germany.

It wasn't until the turn of the year 1933-1934 that the Reichswehr received its first production military machinery. At that time, little was known abroad about Hitler other than that he demanded equal rights for the German Reich among all other states, and that, like all previous chancellors, he aimed for the annulment of the Treaty of Versailles; hardly a reason to rearm against Germany.

1934

In February 1934, Hitler once again offered before the League of Nations that Germany limit its air force to 50% of France's, and he proposed abandoning bombers altogether. At that time, France possessed nearly 2,000 operational aircraft, 1,000 training aircraft, and over 2,000 reserve aircraft in Europe, and over 100 in its colonies.⁷⁹ Thus, Hitler's offer-

⁷⁶ British Air Force

⁷⁷ Terraine, page 25.

⁷⁸ Aviation Minister Côté announces the fulfillment of this plan in the magazine "L'Aero" on February 10, 1937.

⁷⁹ German Air Watch, Volume II, pages 14 f

France offered either a modernization of its fighter jets to approximately 1,000 aircraft or a reduction of its air force. The government in Paris refused both options. Instead, as already mentioned, Foreign Minister Barthou informed the League of Nations in Geneva on April 17, 1934, that France would immediately cease participating in disarmament negotiations and would henceforth rearm without League of Nations agreements, as required by French security. France, too, was entering the race.

In Germany, which at that time lacked the army and navy to defend itself if necessary, the realization grew that air forces, and especially bombers, would be an effective means of deterring foreign states from aggression, such as Germany had repeatedly suffered defenselessly over the previous 15 years. Bombers—unlike fighter planes—were the offensive means of air warfare, designed to threaten the enemy on home soil. Furthermore, aircraft—so the thinking went—could be built more quickly and with considerably less raw material expenditure as deterrent weapons against the two potential adversaries, France and Poland, than battleships for the navy or heavy artillery and tanks for the army. Thus, the development of air forces temporarily gained particular importance for the security of the Reich. The exploratory talks conducted by the Polish government in Paris at the turn of the year 1933-34, mentioned later in this book, regarding whether France would participate in a preventive war against the German Reich, show that these considerations of the Reich government at that time were not unfounded.

The armament planning of this period – specifically regarding bombers – reveals something else. Although four-engine long-range bombers would have been entirely feasible in 1934 – they had been built in Russia since 1930 – the Reich government and the Reichswehr leadership refrained from including such bombers in the German Air Force's plans. There were reasons for this. The first lay in the high production costs, the second reflected the perceived threat level.

No one in Germany, neither Hitler nor the "Reich Commissioner for Aviation," General Göring, saw the need to fight enemies beyond France or Poland. Hitler, too, apparently had no concrete ambitions at that time to later attack England or wage war against the Soviet Union. Thus, only single- and twin-engine bombers with a range of up to 500 kilometers and a penetration depth of 500 kilometers were planned and built in Germany. If Hitler's concept of Lebensraum (living space) had already matured to that extent in 1934, the dictator would not have refrained from building a strategic bomber fleet against the Soviet Union. The additional industrial costs for large bombers would certainly not have been an obstacle for Hitler.

In the spring of 1934, arms races suddenly surged around the world. On January 26, 1934, Germany concluded a non-aggression pact with Poland. This increases the security of the German Reich, but it also begins to weaken France's pact system. When the British government then also...

If the proposal is to allow the Germans 250,000 soldiers for the Reichswehr, the development will become unbearable for the French – from their perspective.

According to British commentators, England's policy towards the continental powers changed in 1934. France's relative strength weakened, while that of the German Reich grew. From then on, Germany was its number one rival. British military historian Major General Fuller described it as follows:

"From the days of the Tudors until 1914, Great Britain's policy consisted of maintaining the balance of power, that is, keeping the great nations of the continent separated by rivalry and exercising a balance between them. This balance automatically determined who was considered an enemy."

80

In May 1934, but even before the next German aircraft production program was decided upon, the Defence Requirement Committee in London called for the establishment of 46 aircraft squadrons. This included 10 squadrons still missing from the "52-squadron plan" of 1923, 10 additional squadrons for the Luftwaffe in England, 10 for the RAF overseas, and 16 for the fleet.

The demand concludes with the statement that 25 more squadrons would actually be needed.⁸² In July 1934, almost simultaneously with the next German plan, the British Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force issued the first RAF expansion plan, which commissioned the construction of the Hurricane, Hawker, and Spitfire fighter aircraft.⁸³ Thus, British air armament in 1934 was not initially triggered by any discernible German air armament. The trigger was probably a mixture of fear of France's lead and apprehension about Germany's capabilities.

Roosevelt also continued to increase military spending. Japan, at war with China since 1932, was becoming too powerful in Asia in his view, and Hitler was a thorn in his side anyway. Thus, in July, he initiated the aforementioned construction program for an additional 120 ships for the fleet, and the Department of Defense announced that the Air Force would also be expanded.

Outside of Western Europe and America, the world is also gripped by an arms race. In Italy, Poland, and Russia, the arms buildup continues. In the Soviet Union, the aviation industry is increasing production to deliver over 3,500 new military aircraft annually starting in 1935.⁸⁶ Fifty percent of these are bombers and ground-attack aircraft.

⁸⁰ Fuller, page 19

⁸¹ Defense Committee

⁸² Terrain, page 27

⁸³ Terrain, page 27

⁸⁴ today the Pentagon

⁸⁵ Rassinier, page 86

⁸⁶ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 4, page 47

The German Reich government, intending to bridge the years of weakness during the reconstruction of the navy and army, focused on the rapid development of air forces. Thus, in **July 1934** – kept secret from foreign countries – a comprehensive aircraft construction program was decided upon. In a first phase, **4,021 military aircraft** were to be procured and delivered to the troops by September 1935, half of them for operational use and half as courier and training aircraft. Subsequent phases **until the end of 1938** planned a further expansion to a total of **17,015 military aircraft**, of which almost 40% were for operational use, the remainder for training and

Reserves.

1935

The buildup of air forces in Europe continued in 1935. In March of that year, the War Office in London, in a White Paper, referred to German rearmament and assessed it as a threat to war. Conversely, from Hitler's political perspective and according to the Reichswehr leadership, England was not considered a potential adversary of the German Reich at that time. From Hitler's point of view, England was more of a possible ally. Simultaneously with the publication of the White Paper in London, Colonel General Beck, Chief of the Army General Staff, justified the further increase in German armaments spending in Berlin by citing the alarming rearmament measures of neighboring states in 1934.

This trend among Germany's neighbors prolonged the period in which the Reichswehr, though growing, was still small and insufficient to protect its own country. Thus, the development of the German Luftwaffe continued with great vigor in 1935. At the beginning of 1935, the German Reich, with its still-secret air forces, possessed approximately 1,900 aircraft – 670 of which were for front-line use – far fewer than the other major European powers.⁸⁸ However, to feign the German Reich's defense capabilities, Reichswehr Minister von Blomberg ordered on February 26, 1935, that the hitherto secret development of the German air force be "unmasked." On March 1, he therefore ordered the establishment of the German Luftwaffe as a new, independent, and third branch of the Wehrmacht, officially announcing its creation to the world.

Although the victorious powers had already granted Germany principled equality in armaments matters in December 1932, a series of severe reactions now followed. On March 1, the same day, a bill was introduced in the French National Assembly to double the duration of military service to two years.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page 483;

⁸⁸ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, pages 480 and 491;

⁸⁹ Rassinier, page 91

On March 1st, England's Parliament, the House of Commons, also passed a comprehensive program for the further rearmament of the army, air force, and navy. The British were not only driven by fear of Germany's renewed strength. They were also motivated by England's colonial ambitions, competition with Japan in the Far East, and concerns in East Africa. Italian troops had massed on Ethiopia's borders, and England, as the "protecting power" of Egypt, was unwilling to allow Italy any territorial gains south of the upper reaches of the Nile. Thus, on March 1, 1935, the House of Commons granted British Prime Minister Baldwin virtually unlimited funds for further rearmament.⁹⁰ The Royal Air Force now had the resources to construct new military airfields on England's east coast and expand existing ones as part of its "Second RAF Expansion Plan."

These reactions from Paris and London are now triggering further reactions.

On March 10, Hitler publicly announced for the first time his plan to increase the German peacetime army to 36 divisions. On March 16, the French National Assembly responded by resolving to extend conscription to two years. That same evening, Hitler made his next move. He introduced a bill to the Reichstag proposing a one-year conscription period. Four weeks later, on April 11, Italy's "Duce," Mussolini, announced his intention to accelerate the expansion of the army's land, sea, and air forces.⁹¹ Armaments continued in the USA, Japan, and Russia as well.

On May 21, Hitler announced the reintroduction of universal conscription in the German Reich. He combined this announcement with an offer to England to limit the expansion of the Reichsmarine and with an offer to all other states to conclude an agreement outlawing bombing and limiting the number of ships, heavy artillery, and tanks.⁹² Only England accepted the offer and concluded the aforementioned naval agreement. Even outlawing bombing was not something the addressed states were prepared to do in 1935. Thus, the rearmament years of 1934 and 1935 initially failed to bring Germany the desired security. The general rearmament outside the Reich initially overshadowed the new troops, ships, and aircraft being commissioned within the Reich.

The arms buildup that swept across Europe from March 1, 1935, onward can hardly be explained by Blomberg's directive to establish an air force and an army of 36 divisions in Germany. After all, all neighboring countries maintained air forces, and they had already granted the German Reich, in principle, equal rights in armaments matters in 1932. Hitler's offer to all countries to introduce arms limits, the pact with Great Britain to limit the German navy, and further guarantees to France also fail to explain this.

⁹⁰ Rassinier, page 96

⁹¹ Rassinier, page 87

⁹² Domarus, Volume 1, pages 511-514

Leaving its boundaries untouched should have had a calming effect.

All of this cannot fully explain the Europe-wide arms buildup up to 1936. France, England, Poland, Italy, and the Soviet Union were clearly rearming primarily due to problems they faced, partly with each other and partly with Japan, in the Far East. Only gradually did Germany's rearmament become visibly prominent in this international development and then itself trigger new arms buildup phases.

1936

In 1936, Germany caught up with its neighbors in terms of the number of military aircraft, while its army and navy remained far from being able to defend the country. Thus, when Hitler ordered German troops to march into the unprotected Rhineland in March 1936, he knew that the Wehrmacht would be unable to withstand a French counterattack and that, in that event, the German troops would have to retreat.

Even the new German air force would still be inferior to the French one in March.

During 1936, approximately 5,200 aircraft of all types were manufactured in Germany.⁹³ Despite these high production figures, the number of newly built aircraft for front-line use remained relatively small.

A small portion of these aircraft is also exported to other countries. Great Britain is also continuing to expand its Air Force. In 1936, orders are placed for the Halifax and Manchester bomber types. Construction and purchase contracts are awarded to the USA, and further aircraft factories are built in England.⁹⁴

At the end of 1936, everyone in Germany still saw the Luftwaffe as the instrument for keeping neighboring states at bay until the army was capable of protecting the German Reich. The Wehrmacht as a whole was still numerically inferior to the armed forces of its immediate neighbors.⁹⁵ Therefore, even at the end of 1936, no one in the German Reich, not even within the Wehrmacht itself, suspected that Germany's arms build-up might, in three years, serve to trigger a world war.

1937-1938

During 1937, the German Reich began to surpass every other major European power—except the Soviet Union—in the number of military aircraft. However, Germany would still not have been able to defend its territory against a coalition of potential adversaries in the East and West. Thus, the arms buildup continued. The air force was developed to deter enemies and, if necessary, to support the army and navy against an attacking France.

⁹³ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page

⁹⁴ 491 Terrain, page

⁹⁵ 17 MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page 493

and supporting its allies has now reached a size and quality that itself becomes a threat to its neighbors.

In November 1937, Hitler informed the commanders-in-chief of the army, air force, and navy in a meeting that he intended to use the Wehrmacht for a purpose for which they had not anticipated the reconstruction of their respective branches: the expansion of the German Reich to include Austria and Czechoslovakia. Hitler let them know that he expected wars to be waged to achieve these goals sometime between 1943 and 1945. The generals' reaction to the intention to annex Czechoslovakia is discussed elsewhere in this book. Here, it should be noted that during the meeting, Hitler assessed the possible reactions of neighboring states to the Anschluss of Austria or the annexation of Czechoslovakia. He largely ruled out the possibility of intervention by France or England. He also dismissed the idea of intervention by Poland, Italy, and the Soviet Union. However, the commanders-in-chief of the three branches of the Wehrmacht present were not so optimistic. They preferred to be proactive and had their staffs investigate the possibilities of armed conflict with England or other states. Thus, from the winter of 1937-38 onward, a war against these states, which everyone—except Hitler—desperately wanted to avoid, came into focus for all those working on building up the three branches of the Wehrmacht at that time and afterward. As a consequence of this new realization that a war with England was also conceivable, a bomber with a greater operational range was included in the aircraft construction program. Its range extended as far as the island of England. However, long-range bombers capable of carrying large bomb loads and flying as far as the industrial regions of Russia were only considered, but never planned or built.

That the fears of the Wehrmacht leadership regarding Hitler's plans were not unfounded was soon demonstrated by the reaction of the British House of Commons to the Munich Agreement. On October 5, 1938, when the members of Parliament approved the annexation of the Sudetenland to the German Reich, they also decided in the same session to build 3,000 aircraft for the remainder of 1938 and 8,000 for 1939, as well as further reinforcements for the army and navy.⁹⁷ In the USA, Roosevelt followed suit with the decision to increase the US Air Force to a strength of 10,000 military aircraft.⁹⁸

The further development of the German Luftwaffe was planned for the years 1943 to 1945. As with naval armament and the Z-Plan, the claim to independent power also emerged here at the turn of the year 1938-39.

⁹⁶ Hitler's meeting with the commanders-in-chief on November 5, 1937, reproduced in the so-called... "Hossbach Protocol"

⁹⁷ Rassinier, page 214

⁹⁸ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 15

Strength over. On **November 7, 1938**, the “**concentrated aircraft design program**” was issued, which envisaged a final expansion of the Luftwaffe with 20,000 aircraft.⁹⁹

1939

But things moved faster than Hitler believed in 1937. In 1939, the remainder of Czechoslovakia disintegrated, and Hitler overruled the Czechs' right to self-determination, occupying the rest of Czechoslovakia as a "protectorate." Six months later, the Second World War began with the German attack on Poland. Consequently, according to the plans at the time, the German Luftwaffe was still not at full strength. However, at the start of the war on **September 1, 1939**, it had at least **4,033 modern frontline aircraft** available for use against Poland.

The air forces of other European states are also far from finished with the expansion of squadrons, the acquisition of new military aircraft, and the replacement of outdated machines. All states are continuing to expand their air forces at a rapid pace, though without preparing for the events of September 1939.

This year, 101 new military aircraft are being built: the Soviet Union over 10,000, Germany just over 8,000, England just under 8,000, the USA almost 6,000 and Japan almost 4,500.

At the outbreak of war, Germany was already the second-largest air power after Russia, but it was still considerably inferior to its three adversaries, England, France, and Poland, combined. On September 1, 1939, the European states possessed the following numbers of so-called front-line aircraft: 102 Soviet Union over Germany England France Poland

5,000

4,033

3,600

2,550

800.

Conclusion

The Reichswehr leadership and later Marshal Göring established and equipped the German air force first for defense against the then aggressive Poland, then for defense against a possible attack by France, and finally also for a confrontation with France plus England.

Up to this point, the ideas of the Wehrmacht leadership coincide with those

⁹⁹ Peoples Documents, Volume 8, page 170
¹⁰⁰ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page 496;
¹⁰¹ Overy, page 150;
¹⁰² Baumbach, pages 45 ff.

Adolf Hitler. Both the generals and the dictator considered the revision of many of the facts established at Versailles their duty and entirely legitimate. Until 1937, the task was to secure these revisions militarily. The defensive rationale behind this rearmament only shifted in November 1937, when Hitler revealed that he intended to expand the Wehrmacht into Czechoslovakia and Austria. Hitler did not voice any further ambitions, particularly regarding Russia and Ukraine, before the war.

For the generals, especially for the Luftwaffe commander-in-chief, Marshal Göring, the annexation of Austria was legitimate. After all, the Austrians had themselves have repeatedly called for the annexation of their country to the German Reich since 1919 demanded. Only the invasion of Czechoslovakia is a point of contention. Hitler wanted to make Czechoslovakia a "protectorate" of the German Reich. The generals were in no way interested in this. Only a dozen army generals attempted to thwart Hitler's plan. The air force generals let the dictator act, perhaps also because they could more easily follow his threat analysis of Czechoslovakia as an "aircraft carrier" for the Russians and French than their army colleagues.

The rapid expansion of the Luftwaffe in 1938 was not, in the eyes of Göring and the generals, specifically aimed at Czechoslovakia, which, with its 700 front-line aircraft and 43 army divisions, could only pose a threat to Germany in conjunction with France or Russia. Rather, the massive rearmament from 1938 onward was geared toward a later war, which Hitler, as he repeatedly stated, considered inevitable if Germany one day demanded its former colonies or replacements for them in Eastern Europe.

Otherwise, the general staff lives by historical experience. They know that for three centuries French governments have been trying to push France's borders to the Rhine. The most recent example of this was France in Versailles in 1919. They know that the Soviets are trying to spread communism to the Atlantic and, if possible, their rule as well.

She knows that England has been waging wars against the strongest power in Europe for centuries. Thus, the reason for Marshal Göring and the generals' continued armament lies in a very vague mixture of a need to protect their own people and preparation for a future war over new territory. However, such a future war of aggression is not prepared for in the operational plans of the general staffs, nor in the troop planning exercises, nor in the necessary armaments until 1939. For example, the German Luftwaffe lacks the capability to conduct a strategic bombing campaign against a distant country. It lacks a heavy bomber fleet.

The other major powers were well-equipped in 1933, in terms of their armies, navies, and air forces, to face Germany. So well, in fact, that some of them...

¹⁰³ Görlitz, page 33

in the 1920s, they were able to invade Germany with impunity, and so much so that Poland and France considered "punitive expeditions" against the German Reich between 1933 and 1936. England, the USA, Japan, and the Soviet Union were already producing hundreds of military aircraft annually in 1932 and before,¹⁰⁴ instead of -

As announced at Versailles – to disarm. The arms race was not started by the German Reich. It joined the race in 1934, then caught up through a massive industrial effort by 1936, and overtook it in 1937. From 1940 onward, it was again England, America, and Russia that surpassed Germany in aircraft production. Thus, the question remains open as to who threatened whom. It appears that every major European power at some point considered attacking another – even if only preemptively.

England and the USA ramped up their fleets and air forces before the new German Luftwaffe became visible to the outside world, and before the governments of both countries could learn anything about Hitler's Lebensraum concept. The three opportunities offered to Germany in 1933 and 1934 to negotiate and limit aircraft numbers were rejected by the victorious powers.

France, in particular, which rejected Hitler's offer in 1934 to limit Germany's military aircraft to 50% of French numbers, missed an opportunity to involve him at a time when his megalomania was not yet growing on the fertile ground of his later successes. If France's fear and hubris had been somewhat less pronounced, the German Luftwaffe could have been limited for a few years by Hitler's proposed "Air Fleet Agreement," just as German naval armament had been in 1935.

Army armaments 1933 to 1939

To connect this to the background, it should be mentioned that in October 1932, after six fruitless years of negotiations, Chancellor von Papen decided to expand the Reichswehr, if necessary without an agreement with the victorious powers; that in November 1932, the Reichswehr's second armament plan stipulated expanding the German peacetime army to 175,000 soldiers; and that in December 1932, the victorious powers in the League of Nations decided to grant the German Reich equal rights in armament matters. Shortly thereafter, Adolf Hitler and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, two politicians alike in two respects, stepped into the limelight of world history: both had to eliminate high unemployment in their countries, and both were willing to enforce their foreign policy ideas—if necessary—through war. Both had a penchant for weapons. Both politicians began immediately after taking office to rearm their countries: Adolf Hitler focused on land power with priority given to the German army, and Roosevelt focused on sea power – as already mentioned – the American navy.

¹⁰⁴ Overy, pages 21

Around the same time, an event occurred that reminded everyone in Germany of the earlier invasions of the German Reich by the victorious powers. On March 6, 1933, Poland landed a battalion of marines in the Free City of Danzig.¹⁰⁵ The League of Nations forced Poland to withdraw the troops after ten days.

But what remains in Germany is the impression that Poland is still seeking opportunities to expand its territory westward. Conversely, the feeling persists in Germany that territories almost exclusively populated by Germans until 1919, and awarded to Poland without a plebiscite, should be "reclaimed" at the first opportunity. The Reich Foreign Minister and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Stresemann expresses this sentiment several times in writing and speeches in 1925, stating that one of the major tasks of German foreign policy is to correct the Reich's eastern borders. Thus, while the Reichswehr leadership in the spring of 1933 is in reality still far from considering an attack against Poland, the wound that Germany has on Poland's border is reopened by the Danzig incident. It is almost as if Poland is the catalyst for the Reichswehr leadership.

1933

The security situation in Germany in the spring of 1933 was such that the Reichswehr would be unable to respond to challenges similar to the Polish landing at Danzig on the Westerplatte peninsula, should they occur on German territory and if the numerous military alliances France had forged against the German Reich were to be used against Germany. Since 1920, France had established a network of alliances with Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, explicitly stipulating military action against the German Reich. Furthermore, since 1931, the Reichswehr had no trained reservists available, and the professional army was barely forming any new reserves. With only 100,000 army soldiers and a maximum of 150,000 state police officers, Germany could not guarantee the security of its own territory in the spring of 1933. France, however, would have 4.5 million soldiers at its disposal in the event of war, including reserves; Belgium 0.6 million; Poland 3.2 million; and Czechoslovakia 1.3 million. Including the German state police, this would result in a numerical disadvantage of almost 1:40 should Germany have to defend itself. This is the backdrop against which Hitler was able to orchestrate an unprecedented rearmament in 1933, without this initially being recognized domestically as preparation for a war of aggression.

In March 1933, at the Geneva disarmament negotiations, British Prime Minister MacDonald proposed 200,000 army soldiers for Germany and 400,000 for France, half for mainland France and half for its colonies. France rejected this proposal and wanted to retain the quota it had granted Germany the previous year.

¹⁰⁵ Großer Ploetz, page 948

Hitler refused to accept equality. As already mentioned, Hitler threatened that Germany would leave the League of Nations if the promised equality continued to be denied. When nothing changed in this regard, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations, and the German delegation left the disarmament negotiations in Geneva. Also in October 1933, Hitler ordered preliminary planning for the later introduction of universal conscription and the expansion of the army to **21 divisions**. By the end of 1933, the army had reached its capacity of 21 divisions.

The Reichswehr then had a strength of 122,000 men.¹⁰⁶ The reorganization of artillery, anti-aircraft and telecommunications units also began.

Given the intransigence of the French, who had thus far shown no inclination to release a large portion of their nearly 700,000 army soldiers, Hitler now demanded 300,000 men for Germany in bilateral negotiations with the British and French. Accordingly, in December 1933, the Reichswehr Ministry drafted a directive for the further expansion of the peacetime army to **300,000 soldiers, the so-called December Plan**.¹⁰⁷ What is remarkable about this plan is the self-perception of the Reichswehr leadership. In a memorandum underlying the plan, it was stated that the wartime army to be mobilized from the peacetime army should be capable of waging a defensive war on several fronts with a reasonable prospect of success. There was no mention of "living space in the East" or a "revision of borders."

1934

At the beginning of 1934, the Germans and French made another attempt to harmonize their army sizes. On December 18, 1933, Hitler had proposed 300,000 soldiers for the Reichswehr and accepted the transition from a professional army to a short-service army, as suggested in the MacDonald Plan of March. On January 1, 1934, the French government rejected the 300,000-man army for Germany and instead proposed that both countries first convert their armies to short service, and only then should the armament and strength of the Reichswehr and the French Home Army be equalized. Since the reduction of the professional army would take many years, since the Reichswehr would not be granted tanks, aircraft, submarines, and other previously prohibited weapons during this time, and since France did not want its colonial army included in this proposal, the Reich government rejected it. After eight years of fruitless haggling, it did not want to be strung along for another six years. That was roughly how long the conversion from a professional army to a short-service army would take. Even a new offer from Germany to limit the planned air force to 50% of the French strength could not persuade Paris to give in on the army size issue.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ MGFA, DR and WW2, Volume 1, page 405

¹⁰⁷ MGFA, DR and WW2 Volume 1, page 408

¹⁰⁸ German limit offer of 21 February 1934

On March 22, 1934, the Reich government published its new budget, thereby revealing that Germany was now rearming – albeit still on a moderate scale – even without an agreement with the French government. The reaction from France was swift. Foreign Minister Barthou declared – as already mentioned –

-, France will cease negotiations and henceforth base its security on its own strength. The last chance has been lost.

In 1934, military buildup in Europe continued in terms of both the quantity and quality of troops and weapons. Despite the German guarantee of Locarno since 1930, France continued to construct its gigantic fortification system, the so-called Maginot Line. Otherwise, the army remained at a strength of 700,000 soldiers.

In England, the motorization of the land forces also began in 1930, followed by the establishment of an armored force in 1931. However, the bulk of the defense budget went to the British Navy and the armament of the air force.

Although Poland concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany in January 1934, in the same year – probably because of Russia – it supplemented conscription with a military auxiliary service for women, thus strengthening its reserves.

In 1934, the Soviet Union expanded its land forces from 600,000 men to 940,000 and established 10 tank brigades and three paratrooper divisions.

Germany's army will reach a strength of 240,000 by October.

Man, and the planned 21 infantry divisions are rapidly growing to 110.

1935

The year 1935 brought another surge in armaments, the causes of which are difficult to pinpoint to a single event. The turn of the year was preceded by Ethiopian attacks against Italians on the border with Italian Somaliland, prompting the Italian government to deploy an army corps against Ethiopia in February 1935. On April 11, it announced in the *POPOLO D'ITALIA* that the Italian army would be increased to 600,000 men. This threatened the British protectorate of Egypt. They also feared that the Anglo-Italian agreements regarding the demarcation of their spheres of influence in Ethiopia would not be respected. Furthermore, England felt threatened by Japan's activities in Manchuria. Equally troubling in England was the apparent rearmament in the German Reich. As a consequence, on March 1, 1935, Prime Minister Baldwin presented the government in London with a comprehensive rearmament program for the three branches of the armed forces. As already mentioned, England justified its own rearmament from this time onward by pointing to that in Germany. Conversely, Germany justified its rearmament by pointing to the alarming arms build-up abroad.

¹⁰⁹ Rassinier, page 87

¹¹⁰ Hermann, page 422

On January 1, 1935, Czechoslovakia extended universal conscription to two years, thereby strengthening its army. The French followed suit on the 13th.

In January, the Saar plebiscite yielded an overwhelming result in favor of the Saar territory's reunification with Germany. Fearing the increase in German power, the National Assembly in Paris decided, almost immediately after the Saar territory was returned, to extend universal conscription for two years. This automatically increased France's army by over one hundred thousand men starting in 1936. At the end of January, Soviet forces exceeded one million troops. This was followed on March 1st by the aforementioned British rearmament program. Now came the next German step.

Hitler used the debate in the French National Assembly on extending conscription to abandon the hitherto maintained secrecy surrounding German rearmament. Following a cabinet decision on March 15, he announced the next day that Germany would establish a **peacetime army of 36 divisions**, build an air force, and reinstate universal conscription. He justified this by citing the refusal of the victorious powers to honor their commitments under the Treaty of Versailles to disarm themselves and instead, as was now the case with the other states, to rearm.

Revealing in this context are the warnings issued by the Reich War Minister, General von Blomberg, and the Chief of the Army Command, General von Fritsch, against this step. Both advised against the hasty build-up of the army and warned that rapid rearmament could tempt the victorious powers into a preemptive war. However, England and France limited themselves to protests. After only three more months, England de facto recognized the legitimacy of German rearmament when it returned to business as usual and concluded the agreement with Germany to limit the size of the German navy.

This publicly announces that Germany will increase its army to a strength of 36 divisions in the coming years. France – by comparison – has 46 divisions and several hundred unassigned smaller units, England 20 divisions including its cavalry brigades, Poland 35 including cavalry, Czechoslovakia also 35, and the Soviet Union is close to reaching its target of 116 divisions.¹¹¹

On May 31, 1935, the German Reich government, referring to the Anglo-German naval agreement, once again offered foreign countries the opportunity to "impose limitations on their armaments that are also adopted by other states." No state accepted the proposal, and all continued to arm themselves.

For the public in the German Reich, the often repeated abbrü-

¹¹¹ Ploetz, World War II, pages 383, 443, 337, 492

The German government's own defense proposals, based on the equality of all states, and the suggestions to abolish certain weapons in all states, were convincing. The rearmament of up to 36 divisions and one year of conscription remained within the bounds of what the German citizen could understand as necessary for defense. This was all the more true given that the announcement of Hitler's corresponding declaration regarding the 36 divisions and universal conscription contained the reassuring and deceptive sentence: *"At this hour, the German government renews before the German people and before the entire world its assurance of its determination... to make the national German armament not an instrument of military attack, but rather exclusively of defense and thus of preserving peace."*

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In **October 1935**, the first conscripts were called up in Germany and 56,000 police officers from the state police forces were transferred to the Reichswehr.

Thus, the number of army soldiers increases from 280,000 to 400,000 soldiers between spring and the beginning of autumn, and the **number of divisions increases from 21 to 29**.

In Russia, the army strength has now risen to 1.3 million men.

Even after the deployment of the 36 planned peacetime divisions, Germany would be defenseless against a French attack in a scenario like the one in 1923. Unlike the German Reich, France possessed trained and equipped reserves in 1935 and could deploy approximately 100 divisions in the event of war.¹¹³ Depending on the involvement of the Russians, Czechs, or Poles allied with France against Germany, the French could count on an additional 50 to 200 allied divisions. Furthermore, France intended to keep the German Rhineland border clear of German troops, thus leaving it unprotected. Therefore, 36 German peacetime divisions could only represent an intermediate size against, in the worst-case scenario, 300 French divisions. Since Hitler's offers to limit army forces failed to gain traction in 1935, it was foreseeable that, following the planned 36 active divisions, the dictator and the army command would both establish further active divisions and—like many other nations—create the same number of reserve divisions. Colonel General Beck, the Army's Chief of the General Staff, described 72 infantry divisions as the number of army units with which Germany would be able to wage a multi-front war with any reasonable prospect of success. This figure reappeared in later planning documents.

1936

The year 1936 was a year of further, albeit moderate, escalation. In March, Germany deployed troops to the previously demilitarized German border region on both sides of the Rhine. This was justified, but it outraged its neighbor, France.

¹¹² Völkischer Beobachter, special issue of March 16, 1935. See Domarus, Volume 1, page 495.

¹¹³ General Gamelin even speaks of 120 French divisions at a cabinet meeting in 1939. See Bonnet, page 266

rich. In July, the Spanish Civil War begins. In England, the General Staff of the British Empire begins raising up army troops in the colonies, thereby creating strategic reserves for England. In France, the universal conscription of two years, decreed in 1935, comes into effect. In August, Germany follows suit and also extends its conscription to two years. In September, France grants Poland substantial loans for the modernization of the Polish army's arsenal. And in the Soviet Union, the peacetime army exceeds 1.5 million men.¹¹⁴

In Germany, army planning was further intensified under the influence of renewed tensions with France. In the spring of 1936, the Army General Staff in Berlin increased the **target number** of divisions to be deployed by autumn 1936 from **36 to 40**. This comprised 36 infantry divisions, 3 panzer divisions, 1 mountain division, and 1 cavalry brigade. A peacetime personnel strength of 793,410 soldiers was planned for this purpose.

In addition to the 40 peacetime divisions, reserves for a "wartime army" are now also being planned. With each cohort completing their compulsory military service from 1935 onward, the personnel strength will increase by approximately 500,000 reservists, or 8 reserve divisions, per year from 1937.¹¹⁵ Reservists from the First World War are also earmarked for security units. With this personnel, it should be possible **from 1940 onward** to mobilize a wartime army of 72 infantry divisions, 3 panzer divisions, 3 light motorized divisions, and 21 security divisions, plus 2 mountain brigades and one cavalry brigade.¹¹⁶ The specialist literature usually sums this up as **102 "division equivalents"**.

The enormous scope of the planning for 1940 seems alarming. However, with the planned expansion of the German army to 2.5 million active soldiers and reservists, the Reich had to orient itself towards the 5.5 million active and reserve soldiers that the French army had at its disposal during the same period.¹¹⁷ In addition, in the event of war, 1.5 million Czechs and Slovaks, 1.5 million Poles, and over 5 million Soviet soldiers had to be considered. In 1936, Reich War Minister Field Marshal von Blomberg, Commander-in-Chief of the Army Colonel General von Fritsch, and his Chief of the General Staff General Beck were of the opinion that their planned army of 102 divisions served solely to secure the territory and sovereignty of the German Reich.

By the **end of 1936**, the army consisted of **40 active divisions plus** one cavalry brigade and the **cadres of 4 reserve and 21 security divisions**.

¹¹⁴ Ploetz, World War II, page 447;

¹¹⁵ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page

¹¹⁶ 443; MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1,

¹¹⁷ page 432; Ploetz WWII, page 386

The number of reserve cadres has grown.¹¹⁸ The establishment of further reserve cadres by 1940 is planned. Thus, within a few years, the Reichswehr's short dagger has become a blazing sword. Even though the German army is still inferior to the French at this time in the number of divisions, tanks, and reservists, it now itself becomes a potential threat to all neighboring states. In addition, since 1936, the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the General Staff of the Army have held the view that, in the event of an attack from two sides, Germany should, if necessary, wage war by launching a counterattack on the territory of the aggressor in order to protect its own border regions from devastation.

In military jargon, this is referred to as "offensively conducted strategic defense." Thus, the army, whose sole purpose was to protect the German Reich, became capable from the end of 1936 onward of attacking individual other states. That Adolf Hitler would use this instrument of the planned 102 active and mobilized divisions three years later to launch a war that would become a world war after only three days, only became clear to Blomberg, Fritsch, and Beck over time. The first of them to recognize the concrete danger was Beck in 1937.

1937-1939

Between 1937 and 1939, the peacetime army, initially planned with 43 divisions, grew to **51 divisions due to the annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland**. At the same time, cadres were formed for the 51 reserve, militia, and security divisions intended for wartime. The annexation of Austria in March 1938 brought six active divisions from the Austrian Federal Army into the planned 102 major formations. The incorporation of the Sudetenland, with its three million German inhabitants, into the Reich in October 1938 enabled the formation of two additional active army divisions. The annexation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia in April 1939, a violation of international law, further strengthened the army's arsenal with weapons, ammunition, and armaments. From the disbanded Czechoslovak army, the German army took over equipment reserves sufficient for 15 infantry divisions.

and the equipment for 3 active Wehrmacht Panzer divisions¹²⁰. But this gain comes at a high price. The annexation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia destroys the last vestige of trust that England still has in Hitler. Thus, this gain is offset by the fact that Great Britain is now also preparing for a land war against Germany. After the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, England reintroduces universal conscription. Already at the conclusion of the Munich Agreement six months earlier, the British army had begun raising 19 new divisions¹²¹. Otherwise, England can save on its own military forces because, in the event of war, it also has access to the troops of the Dominions, just as France draws its troops from the

¹¹⁸ Hermann, page 435;

¹¹⁹ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page 443;

¹²⁰ MGFA, DR and WWII, Volume 1, page 444;

¹²¹ Rassiner, page 214

Colonies. Thus, soon after the start of the war, army divisions from Canada, India, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa will fight on England's side.

Conclusion

The rapid build-up of the 102-division army can be divided into two phases. First, by 1936, under the enormous arms advantage of all neighboring countries and given the perceived threat posed to the German people by the French-Belgian-Polish-Czech encirclement, an active army of 40 divisions had been created, capable of defending the Reich with a reasonable prospect of success. From 1937 onward, in the three years leading up to the war, the active army was augmented only by five additional German and Sudeten German divisions, as well as the aforementioned six Austrian divisions. However, alongside this, and almost unnoticed by the German public, an equally large reserve army was being formed, comprising 51 Landwehr, security, replacement, and reserve infantry divisions.¹²²

With a fighting force of 51 active divisions and 51 more when fully equipped and mobilized, Germany had attained an offensive capability that no neighboring state—except France—could withstand. In Germany, it only became clear to the top generals during Hitler's speech in November 1937, already cited, that the dictator himself intended to wage war for territorial gains in the East starting around 1943. On that occasion, however, Hitler spoke only of Austria and Czechoslovakia. This remained hidden from the population, the officer corps, and the mass of soldiers until well into the war. The illusion of the government's desire for peace was fueled in Germany by a multitude of "information" and feelings. These included the "Führer's" frequent assurances of peace and his initial reticence regarding Poland's outrageous minority policies. They also included respect for the military power of France and the horrific memories of the First World War, which had ended just 20 years earlier. This certainly includes the secrecy surrounding the rapidly growing reserve army. And it also includes, not least, the satisfaction with the now-renewed prosperity in their own country. The population is not willing to jeopardize this prosperity through a new war.

In 1938, the Wehrmacht's role as both a protector of Germany and a threat to foreign states became ambivalent. Depending on the Reich government's foreign policy, it could serve both purposes. From this point on, both custom and abuse were possible. The army leadership focused on protecting the Reich and hoped that the dictator, despite his hints, would not cross the Rubicon.¹²³

She still considers the 102 divisions reached in 1938-39 to be appropriate in light of the army strengths of neighboring states. As early as 1925, when the neighbors lan-

¹²² Herrmann, page 435.

¹²³ By crossing the Rubico River, Caesar breaks away from Gaul in 49 BC. with his troops into Italy in order to take over the rule of Rome.

Since they were not so well-equipped, the Troop Office had considered the number of 104 divisions necessary for the secure protection of the Reich.

In 1939, the conflict between Germany on the one hand and Poland, England, and France on the other was heading towards catastrophe. At the outbreak of war, approximately 100 German active and reserve divisions faced roughly 100 French, 47 Polish, and 20 British divisions. The Soviet Union, with approximately 220 divisions by then, withdrew from the British, Polish, and French camps a week before the war began.

German Army Planning up to 1938

Years and titles of the plans	Divisions + Brigades		Planning horizon
	in peacetime total	number for the war	
1928 Oct. 1. Armaments plan	10	16	1932
1930 April Tasks of the Wehrmacht 1932	10	21	1938
Dec. December Plan	21	63	1938
1935 March Memorandum Troop Office	36	69	1938
June 1936	43 + 1	99 + 3	1941
1938	50 + 1	99 + 3	1943

Guilt and complicity

The international arms race from 1933 onward, which culminated in Germany's victory in Poland in 1939, appears, in terms of its outcome, to have served only the Germans' goal of waging a war of conquest, and the opposing Allied powers only the goal of preventing it. However, the beginning of the rapid rearmament after the First World War lay outside the German sphere. It was found in the armament efforts of the Americans, British, Soviets, and Japanese, and in the advantage the French sought to maintain with their army, air force, and navy on the continent and in the western Mediterranean. These powers failed to comply with their obligations under the Treaty of Versailles to disarm. They broke the treaty before the German Reich could withdraw from it. They themselves opened the gates through which Germany would later circumvent the treaty's arms limitations.

After World War I, the **USA** faced no threat from any other nation. They built up their navy at a pace that, even in 1933 and 1934, could not be justified by Hitler's foreign policy. Roosevelt's primary concern was clearly jobs and expanding power in the Pacific. In 1933, the US government needed employment for over 12 million unemployed people. The second reason was Japan's competition and influence in the markets of East Asia. The claim that the president was concerned with protecting democracy and human rights worldwide—as he later asserted—is untenable, given the racial discrimination against Black people and Native Americans within the US itself and the subsequent alliance with the inhumane dictatorship in Russia. President Roosevelt was evidently already determined in 1933 to enforce US power through war and arms, if and where necessary.

At the beginning of the 1930s, **England** also began to rearm its naval and air forces before the change of government in Germany. At that time, the British only had the French bomber fleet and the Japanese claim to dominance in the western and southern Pacific to fear. Neither Germany nor Italy had yet entered the scene. The demand by the heads of the armed forces for further military funding as early as the end of 1933 could not be justified by a visible German rearmament or by German territorial claims. The origin of their fear of Germany was probably more the vague suspicion that the German Reich might one day become the strongest power on the continent again, and that it would then demand the return of England's colonial spoils of 1919. The British, however, were determined not to cede their foreign rule over Hong Kong, Singapore, and the island groups in the South Pacific to Japan and not to tolerate any new German competition. Thus, they continued their ongoing rearmament from 1933 onward, albeit with altered justifications, and intensified it from 1935. The British were prepared, if necessary, to wage war to maintain their dominance in the colonies and against a new dominant continental power in Europe. Their mother country was not threatened.

France's armament between the two wars was predominantly indirect and defensive. Its concerns lay with Germany and Italy. The Italians demanded territories in Savoy, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. Until 1940, the Germans demanded nothing from France except equality. But even this, from the French perspective, was incompatible with the security of their own country. In France, it was virtually inconceivable that the Germans would permanently forgo the German-speaking Alsatians and Lorrainers, insofar as they too were German-speaking, through a new war. Thus, the fear of Germany was a cornerstone of France's foreign, security, and armament policy; and this remained true despite all declarations of renunciation from Stresemann to Hitler.

Thus, the French are arming themselves to maintain their strength. Naval construction primarily serves security against neighboring Italy, while the construction of the Maginot Line is intended to protect against a German attack. However – it should be remembered – construction of the Maginot fortifications began as early as 1930, when France had over 45 peacetime divisions and Germany over 10.

The indirect armament of the French consists of providing Poland and Czechoslovakia with loans and advisors for the rearmament of their armies behind Germany's back and torpedoing Germany's equality for as long as this is possible.

The **Soviet Union** 's rearmament began around 1930. The government had a number of reasons for this. The first lay in the experiences of the previous 13 years. In 1918, American, British, French, and Japanese troops intervened in the Russian Civil War. Americans, British, and French first conquered Murmansk and then Arkhangelsk in 1918, waging an undeclared war to "recover earlier deliveries of munitions and supplies to Tsarist Russia"¹²⁴ and only left the Soviet Union after almost two years. In Siberia, it was the Americans and Japanese who participated in the civil war there between 1917 and 1922. The defeat of the mighty Russia by the small Poland in 1919 and 1920 was also still fresh in their minds. Thus, the Soviet Union, as a country with long borders and vast distances, needed a correspondingly large military force.

The second reason is Russia's Bolshevism. The Soviet ideology itself is expansionist and attractive to many people in Europe, America, and Asia. It is therefore, on the one hand, a creeping danger to foreign states and, on the other hand, the object of suspicion from the democracies of America and England and of distrust from Nazi Germany. Thus, the Soviet government must fear that England, America, and Germany will want to protect themselves, Europe, and the world from their Bolshevism and will one day invade. A similar fate befell revolutionary France in 1791 when Habsburg, Prussia, and Piedmont allied to reinstate the monarchy in France. Therefore, in 1930, Russia rapidly re-armed its land and air forces, and from 1936 onward, its navy as well.

That the armed forces of the Soviet Union did not only serve to protect the country and communism only became apparent to foreign countries with the invasion of Poland by Russian troops in 1939, shortly afterwards in Finland and with the offensive build-up against Germany in 1941.

In **Germany**, the real reconstruction of the Wehrmacht only began in 1933. The governments of the German Reich up to 1932, with regard to their own military, were striving to regain full sovereignty over their own country and to...

¹²⁴ Dupuy and Dupuy, page 1000

The ability to defend itself militarily was to be rebuilt. The generals of the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht naturally saw their primary task as contributing to these two goals to the best of their ability. They rebuilt the army, air force, and navy, first secretly, then covertly, and from 1935 onward openly, to protect the Reich. The violation of the Treaty of Versailles and the associated breaches of the Reich law of the same wording did not deter the Reich government and the Reichswehr leadership. Too often, the victorious powers had previously failed to uphold and violate the promises made in the Wilson Notes and the text of the Treaty of Versailles itself.

The network of military treaties with which France, beginning in 1920, encircled the German Reich, revived the two-front mentality within the German military. Even the Treaty of Locarno, with Germany's guarantee of France's borders and its renunciation of the formerly German Alsace-Lorraine, failed to disentangle the tightly woven network established by France. Consequently, the Reichswehr and Wehrmacht leadership oriented their development goals for land, air, and naval forces toward France's strengths. The Reichsmarine was to maintain its distance from the British, whom Hitler viewed as potential partners rather than adversaries until 1937-38. Only in 1938, when a partnership with England proved impossible and London made it clear that it would side with France in a future war like the one in 1914, was the planning for the German Navy adapted to the requirements of a war with England.

From November 1937 onward, Germany's top generals could have known that Hitler did not intend to use this large armed force solely for the protection of the Reich. He was speaking of the Anschluss of Austria and the annexation of Czechoslovakia. The warnings and contradictions of these top generals since this conference with Hitler did not absolve them of their shared responsibility for the subsequent abuses Hitler ultimately perpetrated with the Wehrmacht. The groundwork for all of this had been laid by others. The victorious powers of the First World War—perhaps unintentionally—created conditions for the defeated German Reich that closely resembled a dead end. They failed to replace the Treaty of Versailles, perceived by the Germans as a treaty of revenge and atonement, in a timely manner with a peace order that would be acceptable to Germany in the long term. They misused the League of Nations to cement Germany's inability to defend itself, instead of using it—as intended—as a forum for general disarmament in Europe. Their own excessively high level of armament for peacetime has increased the Germans' need for correspondingly strong forces.

The victorious powers of the First World War did not accept Hitler's initial offers to conclude arms limitation agreements, thereby recklessly squandering all opportunities to moderate the pace of armament in the German Reich. The Anglo-German agreement proposed by Hitler

The naval agreement shows that a different course of action could have been successful. The rearmament of the Wehrmacht, initiated in 1932 and intensified from 1938 onward, would hardly have become a reality without this international context. After all, between February 1932 and May 1935, the German Reich government made six offers to the victorious powers to jointly and by mutual agreement renounce offensive weapons, outlaw the bombing campaign, abolish air forces, determine the number of ships, tanks, and heavy artillery pieces, and limit the German air force to 50% of the French and the German navy to 35% of the British. Even if one can doubt that Hitler would have honored his offers and the corresponding agreements later on, the entire process demonstrates that the victorious powers had not the slightest interest in limiting their own armaments, and this at a time when Germany had not yet given them any reason for a "counter-armament." Even in the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, only Germany imposed restrictions on itself. England was allowed to arm itself as it wished.

PART 4

Hitler's War Announcements

UNTIL 1939

Hitler's war announcements up to 1939

The deceptive key to Hitler's "long-term plan"

Hitler's book "Mein Kampf"

The revelatory value of Hitler's speeches

Hitler's assurances of peace

The ignored warning signals and Hitler's inaugural speech to generals on February 3, 1933

Hitler's secret speeches and key documents

Hitler's speech of November 5, 1937, and the Hossbach Protocol

Hitler's new tone towards foreign countries

Hitler's speech to the commanders on February 10, 1939

Hitler's speech of May 23, 1939 and the Schmundt Protocol

Hitler's speech of August 22, 1939, and the seven protocols

Complicity and complicity of the German people

Hitler's War Announcements Up to 1939

Besides the rearmament of the Wehrmacht, Hitler's numerous speeches should also provide evidence of the German people's and military's complicity and guilt in the preparation and instigation of the Second World War in 1939. The dictator promoted his worldview and policies in hundreds of interviews and speeches. Until the war, Hitler strove to gain the support of the German population for everything he did.

But anyone who reads Hitler's writings, interviews, and speeches today will have a startling experience. They will discover the two sides of one and the same politician. They will find the one who publicly spoke of peace all these years, and the one who, in closed circles and secret speeches, clearly showed that he was prepared to risk wars and even to start wars himself.

The deceptive key to Hitler's "long-term plan"

Hitler's speeches could answer two questions. The first is what Hitler truly wanted. Of particular importance here is **when** which plans matured in his mind. It is quite possible that there are differences between "mature" and "ready for implementation." The latter—when Hitler considered something ready for implementation—leads directly to the second question: When did the German public in general, and when did the Wehrmacht in particular, learn what the "Führer's" true intentions were?

The prevailing view among German historians is that Hitler conceived his plans as a coherent system of thought long before seizing power in 1933, and that he conducted the entire war according to an early-devised "long-term plan." Many facts contradict this. Hitler's speeches, however, often give the impression that this was the case. This likely has two reasons. Firstly, Hitler himself liked to retrospectively interpret what happened as the fulfillment of his previous desires and as an intention he had always held. Secondly, the course of the war retrospectively gives some of Hitler's early statements and speeches the significance that, from today's perspective, can certainly be attributed to them.

Anyone who reads Hitler's book "Mein Kampf" and his speeches chronologically will notice that the dictator—as one would expect—constantly adapted his views to the changing world events of the time. Thus, over the years, his likes and dislikes for and against our

Neighboring countries. Thus, England, France, the Soviet Union, and Poland rose and fell in his favor and hatred. This also puts into perspective the often-heard opinion that everything, as it turned out, could have been foreseen from the beginning.

Furthermore, for long periods of his life, Hitler operated in a world of ideas that can be described as nebulous or even visionary. Post-war historiography usually interprets this nebulousness or these visions from the perspective of the outcome of events. It "determines" what Hitler meant and announced with this or that phrase. But what seems plausible from the perspective of the end of events is not necessarily correct in every case. Had subsequent events unfolded differently, Hitler could very well have put his often nebulous ideas into practice in a completely different way.

This realization is very important if, based on knowledge of the evil end of 1945, one dares to conclude that the readers or listeners of Hitler's writings or speeches should have seen years earlier where things were headed.

When Hitler annexed Austria to the German Reich in 1938, it was Dr. Schuschnigg's coup de grâce with the rigged "surprise plebiscite" that triggered the German invasion, not any long-term planning by the dictator. Before the attack on Poland in 1939, Hitler repeatedly told his generals that he did not expect a new war until 1943/44. After the invasion of Poland by German troops, he then didn't know what to do with the conquered territory. Army liaison officer von Vormann in the "Führerbegleitkommando" (Führer Escort Command) describes Hitler's perplexity on this issue at a time when Poland was already almost entirely under German control.

This

does not suggest that Hitler ever had Poland on his agenda as a territorial expansion in a long-term plan.

Similarly, the wars against Great Britain and France in 1940 were anything but Hitler's intention or plan. The expansion of the war to Norway in the far north and to the Balkans and Libya in the far south owed more to the strategies of the British and Italians than to a plan of his own. Even if Hitler had developed a long-term plan, the war did not unfold according to it. This leaves two questions open. The first is whether the "Führer" disclosed his strategy to the German citizens and the German military. The second is whether the German citizens and soldiers should have foreseen the catastrophe of the war from 1939 to 1945 before the war against Poland began.

¹ v. Vormann, page 14

Hitler's book "Mein Kampf"

The first attempts to interpret Hitler invariably refer back to his book "Mein Kampf." In it, the 34-year-old Hitler describes his worldview and program as he saw them in 1924. The book reflects many of Germany's problems during that turbulent time. It is antisemitic and, in parts, aggressive.

However, from around 1930 onward, Hitler himself explained that he had written this book under the very specific circumstances of the early 1920s. In 1923, Germany was hit by total currency devaluation, and in 1921 and 1923, French and Belgian troops occupied Frankfurt, then Düsseldorf, Duisburg, Ruhrort, and then the entire Ruhr region in the midst of a peace that was clearly no peace at all. From 1930 onward, as Hitler gained political influence, he repeatedly asserted in his letters and speeches that his book "Mein Kampf" was written under the overwhelming impression of these events and that he now desired no further conflict with France.

The temptation to believe this must be granted to the Germans in 1933, just as we today allow ourselves to place our hopes on the belated moderation and maturity of formerly radical politicians. Theodor Heuss, the first post-war German Federal President, wrote the book "Hitler's Path" in 1931. In 1968, this book by Heuss about Hitler was republished with a foreword by the historian Professor Jäckel. He writes: *"Since September 1930, Hitler was not only more moderate in tone. He also spoke differently in substance.*

Taking over or at least participating in a government seemed within the realm of possibility, and almost overnight, Hitler's speeches, above all, disappeared from his plans for war and conquest. ... Who would take 'Mein Kampf' and his earlier speeches literally after Hitler himself discredited them?"

*Quite apart from the fact that it seemed too insane to have been taken seriously beforehand."*²

Shortly after Hitler's rise to power, the German ambassador in Oslo, Ernst von Weizsäcker, expressed the same sentiment regarding "Mein Kampf" in a letter to Germany: *"One doesn't learn anything from books. I've just read*

Hitler's somewhat outdated book, 'Mein Kampf.' What impresses me most at the beginning is his warmth towards social misery. This is no reactionary! We must support the new era. For what would come after it if it failed? Of course, one must also support it with experience, knowledge of foreign affairs, and general wisdom." Thus, in 1930 or 1933, Hitler did not give the German listener or reader the impression that he would lead Germany into war in the not-too-distant future.³

² Heuss, page XXXVI;

³ v. Weizsäcker papers, page 70

The revelatory value of Hitler's speeches

Historians and readers today tend to glean their knowledge of the Third Reich and its tragic end from Hitler's early speeches. However, listeners in 1930 or 1934 did not possess the same level of understanding as those in 1950 or 1960. At the time of the speeches, they lacked the many associations that automatically come to postwar listeners or readers of these addresses.

This phenomenon also preoccupied the Theodor Heuss Archive when, in 1968, it set about republishing the book "Hitler's Path" by the now-former Federal President Heuss, originally published in 1932. Heuss, then a member of the Reichstag for the German Democratic Party, describes Hitler's career and program. He criticizes both analytically and rigorously, yet without any hint of sharpness or polemic. This was evidently so embarrassing and suspicious to the Heuss Archive after the war that it commissioned a renowned historian to provide the new edition with a preface and explanatory notes. Professor Jäckel, who wrote the preface, urges readers of this 1932 Heuss book about Hitler and the Nazi Party to "perform two mental operations" if they wish to avoid hasty misjudgments. Otherwise, Jäckel argues, the book cannot be understood as a historical source. He advises the reader:

"He must, for a certain time, banish all his knowledge of later events from his memory, immerse himself in that era, and visualize the circumstances and environment of the author at that time. ...In the autumn of 1931, everything we know today—the seizure of power, the regime, the crimes, the war, and the end of National Socialism—was still an unknown, unforeseen, indeed unimaginable future." This perspective of the early 1930s must be granted today to those who heard and read Hitler at that time. Former Federal President⁴

Heuss later puts himself back in his own position of 1931 when he writes: *"My father gave me an upbringing of bourgeois decency in which crime as a current form of public life did not appear. Our imagination, even though we had some overview of atrocities as historical events, did not extend so far as to*

use crime as an institutional form of state action." The same can probably be said of the entire political and military elite of Germany in the early 1930s.

5

The principle of not blaming people of that time for later knowledge is generally disregarded today. This often involves Hitler's quotes, the sinister meaning of which only becomes apparent later. How often, for example, do we read that Hitler

⁴ Heuss, page XXXIII

⁵ Heuss, page XXXI

In this or that particular speech, as early as 1933, or whenever, Hitler speaks of the living space of the German people. Today's reader immediately thinks of "living space in the East" and, upon hearing the quote, believes that Hitler was already speaking of his plans for conquest in Poland or Ukraine at that early stage.

However, when one reads the speeches in their original text, it often says something like:

"Germany's living space is too small. Germans must therefore be more intelligent, more industrious and more productive than other nations."

Who could possibly think anything bad about that back then? Many historians simply cite the loaded term "Lebensraum" (living space), thereby creating associations that Germans in the 1930s could not have had. Another loaded term, often taken out of context and misused, is "Vernichtungskrieg" (war of annihilation).

Anyone who wants to judge what German citizens and soldiers could have known in 1933 or 1939 must read Hitler's speeches in their entirety, and must forget what they know about the further course of history.

The revelatory value of Hitler's speeches in the 1930s is also diminished by the dictator himself. Hitler evidently knew how to conceal what the people would not accept. This is particularly evident in the later murder of millions of Jews. Dr. Max Domarus, the archivist of Hitler's speeches, summarizes this topic as follows:

"In his public and private speeches, Hitler did not directly announce his intention to gas all Jews or otherwise dispatch them from life to death. Even during the war, when his extermination machine was running at full speed, he limited his speeches to dark allusions and threats. He knew all too well that such an extermination program would be met with rejection by the masses of the people and even by the majority of his party members."

Another factor that diminishes the revelatory value of Hitler's speeches is his habit of⁶ deceiving people when he deemed it necessary.

At a press reception on November 10, 1938 in Munich, Hitler himself revealed this as one of his dubious methods of leadership when he said:

"... Circumstances have forced me to speak almost exclusively about peace for decades. Only by continually emphasizing the German will for peace and its intentions for peace was it possible for me to win freedom for the German people step by step and to provide them with the armaments that were always necessary as a prerequisite for the next step... that such peace propaganda, pursued for decades, also has its problematic aspects, because it can all too easily lead to the perception that the current regime is inherently identical with the decision and the will to preserve peace under all circumstances."

⁶ Domarus, Volume 2, page 25

⁷ Domarus, Volume 1, page 974

Here, Hitler dismantles himself by admitting his dishonesty. And he devalues all his peace speeches.

The "next steps" mentioned to the press were the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland. Thus, this speech did not necessarily imply that Hitler would initiate a war. Rather, the press and the public could draw hope from it that Hitler's method of hardline stance and tenacious negotiation would achieve the revision of the last remaining injustices of Versailles, something the 16 Reich governments before 1933 had failed to accomplish.

But Hitler is already indicating that he will go further, if necessary, to abolish the constraints of Versailles. In the same speech to the press, he says:

"This means illuminating certain processes in such a way that the conviction is gradually and automatically triggered in the brains of the general public: if this cannot be stopped peacefully, then it must be stopped by force; things cannot continue like this under any circumstances. ..."

Hitler's admission that he was deceiving was fateful, and even more fateful was his confession that he was prepared, if necessary, to wage war over the still unresolved issues of Versailles. There was no mention of any further military intentions. The press could only hope that Hitler's hardline approach would allow him to resolve the remaining Versailles problems—bringing the Memel Territory and the population of Danzig back into the Reich—without resorting to war. The German public would never hear of the speech anyway. It remained secret.

Hitler's assurances of peace

The "Führer" endeavored to present himself to the German people as a man of peace. The First World War and the hardship that followed had ended just 15 years earlier in 1933. Thus, Hitler, with all his references to war, Versailles, hardship, displacement, and the intransigence of foreign powers, appealed to the life experiences and feelings that moved people at that time. Furthermore, foreign countries themselves served as his best source of inspiration.

In Versailles, it was agreed that peace in Europe would be made more secure in the long term through the disarmament of the armies, air forces and naval forces of all states.

However, only Germany, Austria, and Hungary are disarming, while all other states are failing to uphold their treaty obligations under the Treaty of Versailles. Even the chancellors before Adolf Hitler had urged the French, British, Italians, Poles, and others to comply with these disarmament pledges and—if this did not happen—demanded the right to withdraw their weapons.

to rearm the Reichswehr to a limited extent. Hitler continued these demands and insisted in public speeches on the fulfillment of the Treaty of Versailles by the victorious powers as well.

Hitler repeatedly offered negotiations on this issue in radio broadcasts and speeches to the Reichstag. He proposed outlawing the bombing campaign. He offered limits on the number and size of battleships, tanks, and heavy artillery. However, every arms limitation he proposed was intended to apply to all nations. Apart from the Anglo-German Naval Agreement offered by Hitler, none of these measures came to fruition. The victorious powers stonewalled, unwilling to relinquish the enormous arms advantage they had gained over Germany in 1933, 1934, and 1935. This played right into Hitler's hands, who easily swayed public opinion on this issue with a few speeches. Hitler exploited the victors' breach of contract and their intransigence, their initially threatening military superiority, and the Germans' memories of the Polish, Belgian, and French invasions in the early 1920s to present peace, defense, and rearmament to the people of his own country as integral parts of a whole.

The second golden opportunity the victors handed Hitler was the violation they had imposed on millions of German, Austrian, Ukrainian, and Hungarian people of their right to self-determination. Adolf Hitler repeatedly and very skillfully linked his declarations of peace with the desire of all Germans for the return "home to the German Reich" of the ten million compatriots separated by Versailles. On May 17, 1933, Hitler told the Reichstag: *"While clinging to our own nation with boundless love and loyalty, we also respect the national rights of other peoples... and wish from the bottom of our hearts to live with them in peace and friendship."*

We are therefore unfamiliar with the concept of Germanization. The intellectual mentality of the past century, which believed it might be possible to turn Poles and French people into Germans, is just as alien to us as we are passionately opposed to any attempt to do the opposite. ... It would have been a boon for the world if these realities had also been acknowledged in relation to Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. ... A thoughtful approach to the problems at that time could easily have found a solution in the East that would have satisfied both Poland's understandable demands and Germany's natural rights.

⁸ Domarus, Volume 1, page 273



Fig. 7: Adolf Hitler in front of the Reichstag on May 17, 1933.
Right: State Secretary Hans Heinrich Lammers, in the background: Hermann Göring as President of the Reichstag.

In 1933, Hitler could be certain that he was speaking for the German people. And what German citizen, after such a declaration of commitment to the right of self-determination, could have guessed that six years later, during the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Hitler would no longer adhere to his word?

A Hitler speech from May 27, 1933, sounds quite similar: *"As much as we as National Socialists reject the idea of making Germans out of foreign peoples, we fanatically oppose any attempt to tear the German people from their people. As much as we are moved by the realization that war brings suffering and misery to humanity, our love for our homeland obligates us to stand up for it. National Socialism knows no policy of border adjustments at the expense of foreign peoples. We do not want a war solely for the purpose of bringing a few million people to Germany who do not want to be German and cannot be. We will never attempt to subjugate foreign people..."*

⁹ Domarus, Volume 1, page 279

This Hitler speech is essentially identical to Wilson's speech of February 11, 1918, in which Wilson assures the German government that, in the event of a peace treaty, there will be no territorial annexations against the will of the affected populations. That Hitler would later disregard the right of peoples to self-determination with the same ruthlessness as the victors before him at Versailles, Trianon, and Saint-Germain was something that citizens and soldiers in Germany in 1933 could not have suspected after such speeches.

Hitler's speeches and appeals for peace and social justice, for technological progress and full employment resonated with the needs and desires of the German population. And since these promises were indeed fulfilled during Hitler's early years in power, the majority of Germans, some approvingly, some begrudgingly, overlooked the downsides of the new dictatorship.

The suppression of opposition forces and the persecution of minorities were, in the judgment of the population after the times of famine, unemployment, and civil war in many parts of Germany, evidently seen as a lesser evil. The perspective of that era prioritized many things that do not hold the same importance today. For example, Gustav Adolf Gedat, an official of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), which represented Germany in the YMCA's world organization, wrote in 1934 in his book "A Christian Experiences the Problems of the World": *"Capitalism has run its course, the old systems have collapsed. If the monumental work of National Socialism succeeds, if this unique program is fulfilled, then Germany will*

provide the world with proof that there is a way out of the chaos of the present, a way that will inevitably become the way for others as well. ... Herein lies the immense task that God has set for our Germany and its Führer."

10

Gedat, too, was unaware of the world of 1939 at that time.

Hitler's peace speeches shaped his image until 1939. In interviews, speeches, and conversations, he repeatedly emphasized that, as a soldier in the previous world war, he knew the suffering that wars bring to nations and soldiers. He swore to peace so often that there was no longer any rational basis for doubting his commitment to peace. Even on occasions that might have prompted such behavior, he refrained from any saber-rattling. Hitler's addresses at the annual Wehrmacht Days, even his oath-taking speeches to Waffen-SS recruits, contained no hints that would suggest he intended to start a war and subjugate other nations.

Hitler repeatedly called upon the soldiers of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS to "stand guard for Germany." These phrases shaped the self-image of the new Wehrmacht right up to the war. The soldiers saw

¹⁰ Gedat, page 30

They portrayed themselves as the protectors of the people, the country, and the homeland. In a proclamation by Hitler dated October 14, 1933, one reads:

"The German Reich government and the German people are united in their will to pursue a policy of peace, responsibility, and understanding." Who can disagree with that?

¹¹

At the New Year's reception for the diplomatic corps on January 1, 1935, he spoke of humanity's "ardent desire for the preservation of peace" and said:

*"No country can feel the need for peace more deeply than Germany."*¹²

At the New Year's reception the following year, 1936, he expressed his expectation of "real peace." In a newspaper interview with the English journalist Ward Price in the Daily Mail of January 17, 1935, Hitler reads as follows:

"When I speak of peace, I am expressing nothing other than what is the deepest desire of the German people." ... I know the horrors of war. ...

What I want is the happiness of my people! I have not seen that war is the greatest happiness, but on the contrary, I have seen only the deepest suffering. I therefore make two confessions quite openly:

- 1. Germany will never break the peace on its own initiative, and*
- 2. Whoever tries to touch us, grasps at thorns and bristles! For just as we love peace, so we love freedom.*

¹³

The interview, which was also published in the "Völkischer Beobachter" two days later, very cleverly addresses the longing for peace of both the English and German First World War generations.

Even before the "Browns,"¹⁴ Hitler's message sounded no different in the early years of his chancellorship. On January 30, 1936, "the Führer" spoke in Berlin's Lustgarten to 30,000 SA men. It was a speech about the internal affairs of the SA. But even here, Hitler did not fail to touch upon the topic of peace.

"At the same time, we also want to be a peace-loving element among other nations. We cannot repeat this often enough. We seek peace because we love it."

¹⁵

Even Hitler's campaign speeches from 1933 onward consistently contained appeals for world peace. Throughout the years leading up to 1939, Hitler seized countless opportunities to address large crowds. He gave interviews to the domestic and foreign press. He delivered speeches and lectures to farmers, industrialists, shipyard workers, party members, bankers, factory workers, teachers, soldiers, and

¹¹ Domarus, Volume 1, page 304;

¹² Domarus, Volume 1, page 467;

¹³ Domarus, Volume 1, page 476;

¹⁴ Party color of the NSDAP

¹⁵ Domarus, Volume 1, page 571

other groups. He uses trade fairs, ship launches, highway openings, sports stadium inaugurations, and other spectacular events to address the media and the public. In these speeches, he almost always works through a repertoire of "messages" designed to sway public opinion.

The message of "peace" was repeated so often that many Germans came to see it as an integral part of Hitler's character. When the occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 proved otherwise, it clashed so badly with the image of Adolf Hitler commonly held in Germany that the initial attempt was to reconcile the horrific reality with the false image of peace projected by the "Führer." This sounds irrational. Yet the German press provided more or less plausible explanations for what the German Reich did in 1939, first against Czechoslovakia and then later that same year against Poland. And this, too, is part of this irrational reality: for Hitler and the German press, Czechoslovakia and Poland themselves often served as the catalysts.

The inhumane treatment of Germans in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the streams of refugees coming from both countries, the breaches of treaties, and the mobilizations at the wrong time provide the German press with ample material to ascribe meaning to Hitler's actions.

Hitler's call for peace never meant "peace at any price." Despite all the bitter experiences of the past and lost First World War, this found acceptance in Germany. Just as the Federal Republic of Germany spoke of "peace in freedom" after the Second World War, thus excluding the idea of a mortal peace under communist foreign rule, so too, from 1933 onward, the phrases were always "peace in secure freedom" or "peace in equality." In the Third Reich, after years of occupation troops, forced removals of livestock, coal, and industrial products, and four invasions of the Reich by foreign troops in violation of international law, this was self-evident to every German citizen.

Hitler is leading the German people onto dangerously thin ice by linking peace with security and equality. However justified their own desire for security and equality may be, it has a provocative effect on other countries. The Germans cannot understand why they are being blamed for the First World War, why the victors still refuse to reduce their troop strength as promised, and why Germany, as a full member of the League of Nations, is being discriminated against by having certain sovereign rights denied to it. At the same time, other countries refuse to accept that the postwar order established by Versailles is unsustainable. Neither Paris, nor London, Brussels, nor Rome understands that it would be better to reorganize the untenable order themselves than to leave it to others to enforce it.

The fatal flaw in Hitler's public speeches between 1933 and 1939 is that they proclaim security and equality for Germany while secretly...

At some point, this might mean uncertainty and subordination for a few neighboring states. In Germany, people believe Hitler because they hope for peace. Abroad, they don't believe him because they fear the Germans.

Unfortunately, the fear is justified. Adolf Hitler abused the Reich's newfound ability to protect itself in order to attack others.

Hindsight is always 20/20, but at the time of Hitler's speeches, one shouldn't necessarily suspect what would later come to pass. For example, the daily order to the Reichswehr at the turn of the year 1934/35 states:

"Our service should continue to have only one goal: Germany's resurgence in a peace of equality, honor, and guaranteed freedom." This theme runs through a large number of speeches in the early ¹⁶

years of his rule. He understands how to give the reconstruction of the Wehrmacht a positive meaning and dispel fears in this regard. On September 13, 1935, Hitler speaks to 100,000 party officials on the Zeppelin Fields in Nuremberg and says the following about the building of the new German Wehrmacht:

"That is the purpose of the creation of our new Wehrmacht. It was not created to wage wars of aggression, but to protect and defend our people, so that Germany would not again fall into the sad fate we had to endure for 15 years. It is not to deprive other nations of their freedom, but to protect our German freedom—that is why it exists." During the election campaign of March 1936, in which Hitler appeared as a speaker in eleven major German cities, he retrospectively appealed to voters for their approval ¹⁷

of Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations. None of his speeches were without passages like the following:

"The people yearn for peace, yes indeed, but for a peace that allows them to live side by side as equals." (Election speech in Berlin)

"My goal is peace founded on the equality of nations. We are a major European power and want to be recognized as such." (Election speech in Munich)

"Don't talk about gestures and symbolic acts, but make peace. That is the desire of the people." (Election speech in Essen)

Otherwise, Hitler masterfully understands how to cater to the wishes, interests, and sensibilities of the population: sports and vacations, wages and prices, education and culture, road construction and cheap cars for everyone, and what the
What people dream of after the hardship of the 1920s:

"I have the ambition to one day erect a monument to myself in the eyes of the German people. But I also know that this monument would be better erected in peace-time."

¹⁶ Domarus, Volume 1, page 464

¹⁷ Domarus, Volume 1, page 530

It is like being in a war. My ambition is that we in Germany create the best institutions for the education of our people. I want us to have the most beautiful stadiums in Germany, that our roads are improved, that our culture rises and is refined; I want our cities to be beautified." 18 (Election speech in Karlsruhe)

Because Hitler eventually fulfilled a large part of his election promises, he led the majority of Germans to believe that he would also keep the promised peace. This belief in the "Führer" persisted not only until 1939, but until Hitler started the war against the Soviet Union.

The ignored warning signals and Hitler's inaugural speech to generals on February 3, 1933

Subtle undertones hinting at Hitler's later intentions were evidently only uttered in closed circles. A speech often cited as proof of his aggressive plans from the outset was delivered by him as newly appointed Chancellor on February 3, 1933, before a larger group of top Reichswehr officers. Four days after taking office, Hitler addressed approximately 30 high-ranking officers at the private residence of the Chief of the Army Command, General von Hammerstein-Equord.

The content of the speech has been preserved in three similar transcripts.

These are notes by Army General Curt Liebmann¹⁹, Hammerstein's adjutant, Major iG von Mellenthin²⁰ and – this may be surprising – the daughter Helga of the host Chief of the Army Command.²¹ As a girl, Helga von Hammerstein-Equord went through a "career" from the Socialist Students' League to the Communist Youth League to the KPD, which she joined in 1930.

From then until 1937, she regularly supplied the Communist Intelligence Service with secret documents from her father's house. For example, on February 14, 1933, a transcript of an unofficially prepared record of Hitler's lecture, held at her father's house, was received by the aforementioned service in Moscow. There are doubts that Helga was the source of this transcript.²²

The following description of Hitler's speech to the generals is based on all three sources mentioned.

In this speech, Hitler introduces himself and his policies to the Reichswehr generals. He seeks their favor and trust. Firstly, the newly appointed Chancellor states what was expected of him at the time: that he will uphold equality.

¹⁸ Domarus, Volume 1, page 604

¹⁹ Jacobsen, page 81

²⁰ IFZ Document ZS 105

²¹ Wirsching, pages 545 ff

²² Wirsching, pages 522 ff

Hitler stated that he aimed to elevate the German Reich among the nations, that he intended to pursue a revision of the Treaty of Versailles, and that he planned to "eradicate" Marxism within his own country. He also explained several things that the generals were sure to be pleased to hear. Hitler intended to keep the Reichswehr politically neutral and to use it solely in foreign policy conflicts. For domestic affairs, he had the NSDAP. Hitler promised the generals that the Reichswehr would remain the only army in Germany. Given the competitive behavior of the now considerably larger SA, this was an important point. Hitler also announced plans to rearm the Reichswehr. With this, the new Chancellor arrived at the part of his speech that could have served as an early warning to the generals.

He explains that the problems of unemployment, population growth, and economic hardship cannot be solved with loans and subsidies on the domestic market, but only with an economy that generates exports to the world market "by any means and at any price," or better yet, with a large-scale settlement policy that requires new settlement space. He still formulates this as a proposal and mentions 50 to 60 years as the timeframe for such a policy. Then Hitler comes to the later often-quoted term "Germanization." He makes it clear that, in his opinion, one cannot "Germanize" people of a different language or race. "One can only Germanize land." Hitler mentions that his ideas about Lebensraum (living space) "probably aim eastward." Following the logic of the idea that one cannot "Germanize" foreign people, he says: *"One must, like Poland and France after the war, ruthlessly expel several million people."*

Hitler was referring to the numerous "voluntary" and forced mass resettlements and expulsions of recent years in France, Poland, Greece, Turkey, and Czechoslovakia. He showed no scruples in his statements, and the generals were well aware of this issue from their own experience. From this concept of living space, Hitler developed his program for the generals: economic consolidation to solve what he perceived as the problem of living space, if necessary by using armed forces.

Today's reader must wonder why the generals present didn't hear the ticking of the bomb Hitler was obviously carrying in his pocket. Certainly, some of the generals present were surprised or alarmed by this passage from Hitler's lecture. Most, however, probably considered the idea half-baked in light of the realities of 1933. The Reichswehr was still a dwarf compared to the armies and navies of its many neighboring states, the coercive measures of Versailles still applied, high unemployment still weighed heavily on the nation, and Germany's coffers were still empty. Against this backdrop, Hitler's thoughts about a war of aggression for colonies or settlement areas seemed downright grotesque. As Major General von Brauchitsch commented after the lecture: "Well, he'll be in for a surprise in his lifetime." And Colonel Fromm, the Chief of the Wehrmacht—

The office says to Lieutenant General Baron von Fritsch: "that the extravagant plans would fail due to the harshness of reality and be reduced to a sober measure."²³ The speech by a new head of government, who, after only four days in office, speaks about settlement plans for the next 50 to 60 years, will certainly not have been taken particularly seriously, given that the average term of office for German chancellors since 1919 has been less than a year.

At the time of the speech—and this should not be overlooked—there were several interpretations that, in apparently good faith, downplayed Hitler's remarks as an exaggerated formulation of an otherwise understandable idea. At the beginning of the century, feeding the population was still a top political priority. The memory of the famine of 1918/19 was fresh in everyone's mind. Thus, some were forewarned by Hitler's frequently repeated mentions of the living space question, while others found trivializing explanations for this Hitlerian idea. Foreign Minister von Neurath, for example, who otherwise did not hesitate to criticize Hitler in discussions with trusted foreign diplomats, categorically denied on such an occasion that

"Living space" could mean the violent annexation of foreign territories. He adds, by way of explanation, that Hitler meant means of subsistence, raw materials, and the like when he mentioned Lebensraum (living space). It is regrettable that Hitler expresses himself as if he were talking about territorial expansion.²⁴ Neurath later admits that he is mistaken here.

Not every instance of saber-rattling should be interpreted as a government leader's intention to start a war. For example, consider this excerpt from his inaugural address in March 1933:

"The nation's difficulties can only be overcome if we tackle them as we would in wartime. We must march forward like a well-trained army, prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of general discipline, because without discipline neither progress is possible nor can the leadership achieve anything. The nation has come before the altar of history and must seize this historically unrepeatable opportunity with dutiful fulfillment of duty, as it

"This is something otherwise only demanded of a nation in times of ²⁵

war," comes from US President Roosevelt when he explained his New Deal economic and social program. Theatrical language and the explanation of economic issues in the guise of military phrases were—as this example shows—not uncommon in the 1930s. Even the American audience would not have immediately expected war from their new president's words.

²³ Wirsching, page 543

²⁴ Kunert, page 63

²⁵ Kunert, page 35

The talk of peace, of Germany's greatness, and of the National Socialists' achievements in reconstruction continued until 1939. In his speeches, Hitler often railed against Bolshevism, the Jews, capitalism, the incorrigible bourgeoisie, the Church, and foreign countries. The "narrow living space of the Germans" was also a recurring theme. Although Hitler had already been in

In his book "Mein Kampf,"²⁶ Hitler advises Germany to renounce its former imperial colonies and instead acquire living space east of Germany. However, in his speeches, he sporadically mentions a claim to the former German colonies. It is likely that he merely intends to remind the public of the space and food supply issues he considers problematic. Such speeches do not initially allow for conclusions about concrete plans of conquest, as Hitler usually leaves the mention of the problem open to interpretation with understandable reasoning. In a radio address on May 1, 1937, for example, he says:

"Our problems in life are more difficult than those of other nations. ... We Germans have been more than neglected by nature on this earth. A great people, an infinitely capable people, a hardworking people who want to live and who have the right to make demands on life, lives in a space that is far too small and too limited to provide itself, even with the greatest diligence, with everything it needs from its own resources. ... Precisely because this struggle for survival is much harder for us than anywhere else, we must draw special conclusions from this fact, which is our destiny. We cannot exist on phrases, on idioms and theories, but only on the result of our work, our ability, and our intelligence."

27

Hitler then continued his radio address with thoughts on production, the Four-Year Plan, and wage and price stability. In 1937, the average person on the street might have thought: "A scoundrel who thinks evil of it." From 1941 onward, the words "we must draw special consequences from this fact" could be interpreted quite differently.

Hitler's public speeches before the Wehrmacht troops invaded the remainder of Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1939 reveal no intentions of war. They reflect rather the widespread desire for peace among the German population at that time. The situation is different with some of Hitler's secret speeches from November 1937 onward.

Hitler's secret speeches and key documents

From November 1937 onwards, a few, very few, of Hitler's speeches take on a new quality. These are addresses to a closed circle, which for the first time reflect...

²⁶ Hitler, pages 736 ff

²⁷ Domarus, Volume 1, page 690

These speeches allow conclusions to be drawn about Hitler's intention to wage war on his own initiative. Particularly noteworthy are the three speeches of November 5, 1937, May 23, 1939, and August 22, 1939. Historians consider them key to uncovering Hitler's criminal plans to wage war, break treaties, subjugate peoples, and conquer territory. The term "key" originates from the Nuremberg Trials of 1945 and 1946, in which the transcripts of these speeches were presented as so-called **key documents**, proving the guilt of the "main defendants." The political leaders and the top military commanders of the Third Reich were accused in the trial of "jointly planning war and conspiring against peace."

The key documents are intended to prove that Hitler revealed his plans to the defendants in Nuremberg, that they thus became accomplices and are therefore partly responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War.

The so-called key speeches stand in some ways in contrast to Hitler's public speeches. However, there are doubts about the veracity of the transcripts of these speeches. Therefore, the Nuremberg key documents containing the secret speeches must be examined closely.

In the first of these key speeches, the editor of the collected Hitler speeches, archive director Dr. Max Domarus, himself admits that such doubts exist, but he dismisses them by pointing out that Hitler's later war policies retrospectively confirmed the authenticity of the speech transcripts.²⁸ This logic can only prove Hitler's guilt for the war, but not that of his listeners, who—a question that remains open—whether or not they knew Hitler's plans from November 1937 onward.

The accurate or inaccurate reproduction of these Hitler speeches is crucial to the question of whether the Wehrmacht leadership recognized Hitler's intention to wage war independently. There are serious doubts regarding the evidentiary value of these documents in a legal assessment.

Hitler's speech of November 5, 1937, and the Hossbach Protocol

The first of the three key speeches—dated November 5, 1937 —was actually a meeting. War Minister von Blomberg requested a conference with Hitler to discuss urgent armaments and raw material issues with him and the commanders-in-chief of the three branches of the Wehrmacht. Historians therefore refer to it as a speech because essentially only what Hitler said in the meeting has survived. The "speech" is now called, according to the

²⁸ Domarus, Volume 1, page

²⁹ 756; Domarus, Volume 1, pages 748 ff.

The man who wrote the transcript is named after Colonel Friedrich Hoßbach, Hitler's adjutant in the Wehrmacht at the time. The transcript has misleadingly gone down in history as the Hoßbach "Protocol," but it has no official record. Hoßbach, who cannot take shorthand, wrote down from memory what he remembered five days after the meeting between Hitler and the generals. When he presented the document to Hitler for review and verification, Hitler had no time to examine it and initial its contents. After War Minister von Blomberg and the Chief of the Army General Staff, Beck, had read the handwritten transcript, it was filed away.

In the Nuremberg trial, the "Hossbach Protocol" reappears as the main piece of incriminating evidence against the participants of that meeting eight years earlier.³⁰ However, what is now presented as the protocol is not Hossbach's original document. It is a photocopy of a typewritten transcript of Hossbach's written record. General Hossbach is questioned about this "Hossbach Protocol" in March and June 1946 as a prisoner of war—though not as a witness in the trial. He testifies that he cannot confirm that the copy presented here corresponds in all parts to his 1937 record.³¹ However, "in summary," the copy is a reproduction of his original.³²

"In summary" means not in detail. Hossbach did not have his notes typed up himself. This was done in 1943 or 1944 by an officer who entrusted the copy "to a relative," who then forwarded it to the Allied powers.³³ The path of the Hossbach notes from 1937 to 1946 leaves a few questions unanswered. It is possible that the "Hossbach Protocol" accurately reflects, in terms of content, clarity, and nuance, what Hitler revealed to the general staff in November 1937. It is also possible that the notes were revised on their way to Nuremberg in such a way that they only then became evidence. After all, Hitler's Luftwaffe adjutant, von Below, writes that, to his recollection, the copy is longer than the original he saw.³⁴ In 1946 at the Nuremberg Trials, Reichsmarschall Göring pointed out that some of the points and formulations in the present "piece of evidence" were not the style of the "Führer".³⁵

Grand Admiral Raeder also doubts the authenticity of the transcript and copy and requests in the trial that the original transcript, which is in the possession of the Americans, be presented.³⁶ His lawyer wants to verify whether there is a connection between the

³⁰ IMT Documents, Volume XXV, pages 402ff, Document 386-PS/US-25;

³¹ IMT Documents, Volume XLII, page 229;

³² IMT Documents, Volume XLII, page 229 and Hoßbach, page 192;

³³ Hoßbach, page 190;

³⁴ v. Below, page 49;

³⁵ IMT Proceedings, Volume IX, page 344

³⁶ IMT Proceedings, Volume XIV, page 43 and Raeder, Volume 2, page 150

The machine transcript and photocopy have been edited.

The court rejects this request. The Americans refuse to submit the original typewritten transcript for examination. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that the copy submitted in court contains some incriminating "unambiguous" statements and exaggerations that did not originate from Hitler. The suspicion and its refutation must remain open.

Another point of suspicion regarding the "hairstyle" on the Hossbach Protocol arises from the marginal notes that the original or the copies are said to have contained. Hossbach claims to know nothing of these notes during his interrogation, but he could be mistaken. The photocopy of the transcript presented as evidence in Nuremberg bears such marginal notes from the Reich Minister of War, von Blomberg, Colonel General Baron von Fritsch, and, according to the British chief prosecutor Shawcross, also a written marginal note from Fritsch's successor, Colonel General von Brauchitsch.³⁷ Von Fritsch, who was present at that conference, embarked on a long journey to Egypt on the day Hossbach wrote his document. Hossbach himself doubts that von Fritsch ever read his "protocol." With von Brauchitsch, however, the situation is quite clear. According to all logic regarding the lines of information and responsibilities, he could not have seen Hossbach's document. Von Brauchitsch also testified in Nuremberg that he only learned of the entire conference and its minutes during the trial, that his predecessor Fritsch had not informed him of the meeting in November 1937 when he handed over his official duties at the beginning of February 1938, and that even the Chief of the General Staff, Beck, had not mentioned the meeting.³⁸ At least Brauchitsch's marginal note on the "minutes"—if not Fritsch's as well—is therefore a forgery. The obvious manipulation of the marginal notes, just like the aforementioned peculiarities, strongly calls into question the credibility of the document presented in Nuremberg.

The dispute surrounding the Hossbach Protocol centers on its content. The prosecutors in Nuremberg argue that the transcript proves Hitler disclosed his war intentions to the gentlemen present, and that they are therefore complicit and complicit. Thus, what matters is what Hitler actually said in November 1937, not what Hossbach put into writing. Grand Admiral Raeder testifies before the Nuremberg Military Tribunal that he and Reich War Minister von Blomberg did not leave the conference with the impression that Hitler intended to replace his previous peace policy with a new war policy. The accused Grand Admiral therefore demands that General Hossbach be summoned, as he would be available to testify at that time. The court rejects an interrogation of Hossbach in the presence of Raeder or his defense attorney, Dr. Siemers.

³⁷ Dessen, page 184

³⁸ IMT, Volume XX, page 620

The evidentiary value of the so-called Hossbach Protocol is therefore subject to no fewer than four reservations. Firstly, it is not certain that Colonel Hossbach accurately recorded in writing, after five days, exactly what was discussed at the conference.

Secondly, it is not known whether the first transcript reproduces the content of the handwritten notes completely unchanged. The copyist is unknown, and no authentication of the transcript has survived. Likewise, it is not guaranteed that the photocopy submitted in Nuremberg corresponds to this transcript.

Thirdly, the manipulation of the marginal notes reinforces the suspicion that other things have also been altered. And fourthly, it increases all doubts that the military tribunal in Nuremberg avoided questioning Hossbach in Raeder's presence.

The researchers at the Military History Research Office (MGFA) do not share any of these doubts. They consider the authenticity of the protocol's contents proven through "source-critical investigations" and the recorded reaction of the Army Chief of Staff, General Beck. The MGFA thus relies on a general who was not present, namely Colonel General Beck.

Despite all reservations about the copy of the Hossbach transcript presented in Nuremberg, the reactions of the six gentlemen present demonstrate how explosive Hitler's remarks must have been that November evening. The ministers and generals clearly understood that Hitler must now have been prepared to play with the fire of a new war. Foreign Minister von Neurath, War Minister von Blomberg, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army von Fritsch attempted to refute and restrain Hitler in the meeting, drawing on arguments from their respective areas of expertise. They fully recognized their responsibility as political advisors to Chancellor Hitler.

Foreign Minister von Neurath felt so burdened by Hitler's willingness to revise the provisions of Versailles and Saint-Germain, if necessary by military force, that he requested his resignation. He testified before his Nuremberg judges regarding the meeting in question: *"Even if these plans, presented by Hitler in a lengthy speech, lacked concrete content and allowed for various possibilities, it was nevertheless clear to me that the overall tendency of his plans was aggressive in nature."*

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Colonel General von Fritsch attempted to persuade Hitler to change his mind once more during a meeting on November 10. Fritsch, who was then away on a trip to Egypt, was represented in his absence by the Chief of the Army General Staff, Beck. The "minutes" made a "devastating impression" on Beck, who had not personally participated in the meeting.⁴⁰ Knowledge of these Hossbach notes prompted Beck to write three memoranda against Hitler's risky policies.

³⁹ IMT Proceedings, Volume XVI, page 700

⁴⁰ Hoßbach, page 191

The reactions of the ministers and generals show that Hitler evidently revealed something extraordinary to them that evening: his intention to change the existing course of German foreign and security policy. Until then, this course had focused solely on Germany's equality, the revision of Versailles and Saint-Germain, and the defense capabilities of the German Reich. The significance of Hitler's speech of November 5, 1937, lies in the fact that it became apparent for the first time that the dictator intended to exploit the "opportunities" of future European wars between other states and, given the right moment, to pursue annexations himself. Hitler did not, however, present the generals and ministers with a "war plan," as the MGFA puts it.⁴¹

But now to the content of this Hitler speech, as the Nuremberg judges left it to us. Hitler first explains to the six gentlemen assembled that November evening that he wishes to inform them about "his fundamental thoughts on the development possibilities of the foreign policy situation."

Right at the outset, he emphasizes that his foreign policy is designed for the long term and requests that the following remarks be considered his political testament in the event of his death. This statement is significant insofar as it sheds light on Hitler's territorial ambitions as he held them in November 1937. It even suggests that, beyond the unveiling of his will, he had no further objectives at that point in time.

Hitler's first point is that he sees his political task as securing the livelihood and food supply for the 85 million Germans, including the expected population growth. From this, he derives "the right to greater living space" and reflects on the question of whether Germany's lack of space can be remedied through economic autarky, increased participation in world trade, or some other means. Regarding economic autarky, Hitler believes it is unattainable, at least for raw materials and foodstuffs. In his opinion, participation in the global economy is therefore indispensable. Hitler then weighs the options available to Germany in this regard. He rejects dependence of the German economy on free trade across the world's oceans because this trade is subject to the whims of England. It can be assumed that Hitler is thinking here of the British blockade of Germany during the hunger blockade of 1918 and 1919.

Hitler then turns to the possibility of acquiring colonial powers overseas. He dismisses this, arguing that all colonies in Africa and Asia are already distributed and cannot be regained without wars against England or France. Therefore, he proposes that arable land and mineral resources within Europe are the solution he envisions. In these remarks about the "too limited living space," Hitler does not yet reveal what he has in mind.

He doesn't mention Poland, Ukraine, or Russia at all.

⁴¹ MGFA, Mil.Gesch., page 188

Hitler, it should be noted, was well aware of the danger inherent in the solution he was considering involving more living space within Europe. Just shortly before this November conference, the British opposition MP Winston Churchill had told the German ambassador in London, von Ribbentrop, during an exchange of views on Hitler's considerations on this matter, quite clearly, that England would never tolerate any attempts by Germany to expand eastward.⁴² Clearly influenced by these unambiguous words from Churchill, Hitler concluded this part of his remarks with the sentence:

"The only way to solve the German question is through violence. This will never be without risk."

Regarding the question of the use of force, Hitler now turns to three possibilities, which he calls three "cases." Case one would be a war between 1943 and 1945. Hitler explains that with a rising population and a lack of reserves, the German Reich would face food crises from 1943 to 1945 onwards, especially given poor harvests. These crises could not be overcome solely by purchasing food abroad due to a lack of foreign currency. Germany needed a foreign market, but foreign countries were increasingly isolating themselves. The Wehrmacht was now almost fully established, and Germany's strength could hardly be increased further. Foreign militaries, on the other hand, were only just beginning to develop. Sometime before 1943, the peak of Germany's relative strength would have passed. And since "the world is expecting our attack and is taking more and more countermeasures each year," Hitler says, "it would be better to act first ourselves." Thus, it was his irrevocable decision to resolve the territorial question no later than 1943 to 1945. What exactly Hitler had in mind territorially, he did not initially reveal to the generals at this point.

Cases two and three deal with France's role in Europe and in Africa.

Should France ever be tied down by a civil war at home or by its disputes with Italy or Spain, Adolf Hitler intended to use this to "settle the Czech and Austrian questions." This twist in Hitler's words is the crux of the matter.

Hitler's remarks that evening, as recorded by Colonel Hossbach, deal exclusively with "living space" in Czechoslovakia and the annexation of Austria. Living space in Eastern Europe is never mentioned. What Hitler otherwise discusses at length with his six listeners are the possible reactions of Great Britain, France, Italy, Poland, and the Soviet Union. He gives no indication whatsoever that he might harbor any intentions of aggression against these states. The Bolshevik threat is also not addressed that evening, so Hitler does not bring up the possibility of war with Russia.

⁴² Churchill, World War, page 98

Since Hitler refers to his lengthy pronouncements on the "development possibilities of the foreign policy situation" as his testament, what he presents here appears to be comprehensive. He wants the annexation of Austria and he wants Czechoslovakia. Nothing more is mentioned in this "last will and testament" from November 1937.

From November 5, 1937, Foreign Minister von Neurath, the four leading figures of the Wehrmacht, and Colonel Hossbach knew that Hitler was willing, if necessary, to wage war on his own initiative in order to annex Austria and Czechoslovakia to the German Reich. According to Hossbach's minutes, what apparently alarmed the gentlemen present at this turn of events was Hitler's evident readiness to wage war. What presumably did not bother them to the same extent was Hitler's desire to redraw borders. This was nothing unusual in Europe at the time. During these years, England had claims on Ireland, Spain on Italy, Italy on France, Poland and Hungary on Czechoslovakia, Lithuania and Russia on Poland, and Norway on Denmark. Border regions were hardly sacred to anyone in Europe during the 1930s.

As far as Austria and the German-populated part of Czechoslovakia are concerned, annexation by the German Reich would simply be the exercise of the affected parties' right to self-determination. The elected representatives in Austria and the Sudetenland themselves decided in the Vienna National Assembly in 1918 to join Germany.

Regarding Czechoslovakia, Hitler concludes his remarks by outlining two possibilities. He states that if a war he anticipates between the Italians, Spaniards, and French over their mutual territorial claims leads to the mobilization of other European states, he intends to "seize this unique opportunity for a campaign against Czechoslovakia." However, he also intends to do so if the other states refrain from intervening in a war among the Mediterranean countries. The Hossbach Protocol further states that Hitler expects an annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia to provide enough food for five to six million people, based on the "forced emigration" of two million people from Czechoslovakia and one million from Austria. This concludes the famous Hossbach Protocol. The second part of the discussion from November 5th, concerning solely armaments issues, has not survived.

At this conference, Hitler reveals for the first time in a small circle that he would be willing to wage wars himself, given the right opportunity. However, he limits this to Austria and Czechoslovakia. He speaks of a "testament," thereby implying that he sees no further objectives beyond these two neighboring countries. There is no mention here of a major war, of Lebensraum in Ukraine, or of a later campaign against Bolshevism and the Soviet Union.

Even his assessment that a war with France would eventually occur-

Hitler downplays the threat by repeatedly stating that he does not want a war to break out with France or England. Hitler drafts a plan on the 5th.

In November 1937, he presented no plan. He revealed his intentions regarding Austria and Czechoslovakia, spoke of many possibilities, and ultimately left open what he had specifically decided.

Thus, neither the Nuremberg Military Tribunal's suspicion that the participants in that November 1937 meeting "jointly planned a war" nor the suspicion that they "instigated a conspiracy against peace" is justified. On the contrary, von Neurath, von Blomberg, and von Fritsch contradicted Hitler's musings both during the discussion and on several occasions afterward. Moreover, the army leadership, with the three memoranda already mentioned from Chief of the General Staff Beck, clearly took a stand against a potential conquest of Czechoslovakia. Beck was dismissed when he attempted to turn a majority of the generals against Hitler. One certainly cannot speak of a conspiracy against peace by the six generals and ministers.

Whether every detail and formulation preserved in the Hossbach Protocol presented in Nuremberg, and whether every expression of readiness for violence and cynicism that can be read therein is truly Hitler's original words, cannot be determined given the doubts surrounding the document's authenticity. Forgeries of other Hitler speeches make this not improbable. For the complicity and shared responsibility of the generals and ministers present, what Hitler actually said on that November 5, 1937, is crucial. This includes his choice of words and nuances, his omissions and additions.

Neither the public nor the military in Germany learned of any of this struggle over a policy of peace or war. Even when the commander-in-chief of the army changed three months later, Colonel General von Fritsch did not inform his successor, von Brauchitsch, about the content of that discussion. At that time, no one in Germany would have assumed that the Wehrmacht could serve any purpose other than the protection of the country and its people.

On November 5, 1937, Germany and Poland also concluded a new minority protection agreement, which gave no one any indication that Hitler was considering wars of aggression on the same day.

For the public, Hitler continued his campaign for peace. The population of the country, and with it the soldiers of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS, thus had no reason to fear the worst, even after the generals' meeting of November 5, 1937. In his New Year's address of 1938, for example, Hitler spoke of the nation's future and added the following thought: *"In foreign policy, this requires the expansion of the German Wehrmacht."*

For only as a strong state can we, in such turbulent times, preserve for our people that precious gift which seems most precious to us: peace. For the restoration of German-

The success of our nation has been achieved without any external attack, solely through the achievements of our people within. ... May the grace of God also accompany our German people on their path of destiny in the coming year, is our deepest prayer."

43

Who could possibly suspect anything bad from such a New Year's message?

Hitler's new tone towards foreign countries

The year 1938 brings the Sudetenland crisis.

At the Munich Conference, the governments of England, France, Italy, and Germany decided that the Habsburg-German Sudetenland should be separated from Czechoslovakia and transferred to the German Reich. This latest success revived public confidence in Hitler's apparent method of bringing the Germans, separated by Versailles, "home to the Reich" solely through threats, stubbornness, and negotiation. The German people initially had reason to believe Hitler's assurances that

Germany has no interest in the Czechs.

Following the success of the Munich Conference, Hitler began to reinterpret the return of the Sudeten Germans in public speeches as solely his own achievement. He downplayed the support of the governments in London and Paris, which—as was actually the case—had only cooperated under his threat. Hitler thus unnecessarily offended foreign powers.

Hitler's New Year's address of 1939 sounds very similar to that of 1938. It is filled with gratitude for the "return" of the Austrians and Sudeten Germans in the past year. It concludes: *"Furthermore, as always, we have only one*

wish: that in the coming year we may also succeed in contributing to the general pacification of the world. May the grace of God accompany our German people on their path of destiny."

Even in his brief New Year's order to the Wehrmacht, Hitler strikes no aggressive tones:

"Soldiers!..."

44

"I am certain that you will always be ready in the future to protect the nation's rights against everyone." Thus, the German citizens and members of the

45

Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS entered the war year of 1939 with Hitler's assurances of peace ringing in their ears and minds.

⁴³ Domarus, Volume 1, page 774

⁴⁴ Domarus, Volume 2, page 1025

⁴⁵ Domarus, Volume 2, page 1027

In 1939, Hitler's speeches took on a new tone. Following the successes of recent years, the dictator became more self-assured and tended to boast, polemicize, and provoke. However, in public speeches, he still did not explicitly state his willingness to wage war for further objectives. Nevertheless, his readiness to reach a consensus with the victors of 1918 was noticeably diminishing.

On January 30, 1939, Hitler delivered a government statement to the Reichstag at the Kroll Opera House in Berlin, which he—like politicians worldwide—began with a lengthy list of his own successes. He did, however, thank the heads of government of the three states who had given their approval in Munich for the return of the Sudeten Germans, but then he succumbed to the "recipe for success" of Munich and flexed his muscles. He declared that the solution to the Sudeten question had only been possible because he had threatened war. What followed was understandable, but extremely unwise for the chancellor of a middle power:

"Germany has established the right to self-determination for ten million German citizens in a territory where neither the English nor any other nation has any business. It has thereby threatened no one; it has merely defended itself against the attempt at interference by third parties. And I need not assure you, my representatives, that we will not tolerate in the future any attempt by Western states to simply meddle in certain matters that concern only us, in order to prevent natural and reasonable solutions through their interference."

Aside from the euphemistic phrase "threatened no one," Hitler's words convey two tenets that would subsequently prove fatal for him and the German people.⁴⁶ The first is that stubbornness and determination are always successful. The

second is that Germany's further revisionist policies to compensate for the remaining damages of Versailles are possible unilaterally and without the consent of the former victors. These two flawed approaches marked the beginning of Hitler's disastrous foreign policy blunders of 1939: the occupation of the remainder of Czechia and the attack against Poland.

The aforementioned government declaration of January 30, 1939, focuses on economic issues and the limited living space of the Germans. Hitler states on this topic that expanding living space is currently impossible and asks: *"Under the circumstances now prevailing, we have no other option than*

to continue an economic policy that must strive to extract the maximum possible from the given living space. This requires an ever-increasing increase in our output and a rise in production..."

" 47

⁴⁶ Domarus, Volume 2, page 1049

⁴⁷ Domarus, Volume 2, page 1053

That Adolf Hitler would exploit the breakup of Czechoslovakia just six weeks later to conquer the remaining Czech territory as the first piece of "living space in the East" could not have been suspected by any of the members of parliament present, given these words.

Hitler continued his government declaration with a rebuke of the American and English press, which he accused of accusing Germany of plotting to "attack England and America." He railed against Jews and Bolsheviks and concluded with a discussion of Germany's foreign relations. In doing so, he again appealed for the friendship of the Americans, British, and French, albeit with a pointed remark. Hitler, "with all due respect," forbade foreign interference in German affairs. He appealed to the peace-loving spirit of foreign governments and concluded his speech by noting the currently good relations with neighboring Poland. While the speech may have sounded pleasing and flattering to German ears after years of victorious tyranny and hardship, it was poison for the Reich's foreign policy. Once again, Hitler instilled in the German people the illusion of peace with their neighbors. This may well have been because, in January 1939, he himself still harbored illusions about German-Polish relations.

Following the chronological sequence, Hitler's lecture of February 10, 1939, should now be mentioned. However, because Hitler delivered this lecture to a closed circle of army troop commanders, it will only be discussed after the chapter "Hitler's New Tone Towards Foreign Countries."

In the first half of March 1939, Czechoslovakia disintegrated amid conflict between Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians, and Hitler, through a forced treaty, made Czechoslovakia a protectorate of the German Reich. The annexation of the remaining Czech territory was unpopular in Germany. People questioned its necessity and noted the broken promise. After all, on May 27, 1933, when Hitler came to power, he had declared in a radio address: "*We will never attempt to subjugate foreign peoples.*" During the Reichswehr troops' march into the

unprotected Rhineland, Hitler stated: "*We have no territorial demands to make in Europe.*"⁴⁸ Four days before the Sudeten Germans returned to the Reich, he reiterated this before a large audience at the Sportpalast in Berlin: "*It is the last territorial demand I have*"⁴⁹ to make in Europe.⁵⁰ ... *We don't want any Czechs at all.*"⁵¹

With the annexation of the remainder of Czechia, Hitler openly reveals himself to his own people as a liar for the first time.

⁴⁸ Domarus, Volume 1, page

⁴⁹ 279 On March 7, 1936, Domarus, Volume 1, page

⁵⁰ 596 On September 26, 1939, Domarus, Volume 1, page

⁵¹ 927 On September 26, 1939, Domarus, Volume 1, page 932

Two weeks after the occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, on March 31, England offered Poland a guarantee of protection against Germany, and Poland henceforth remained stubbornly opposed to the Danzig question. Hitler was outraged. He refused to understand that the move to Prague was the beginning of a wrong path. The day after England's offer to Poland, on April 1, 1939, Hitler used the launching of the battleship "Tirpitz" in Wilhelmshaven as an opportunity for a public appearance and a speech. He attempted to justify his actions in Czechoslovakia and reacted angrily to the British offer to the Poles. On the one hand, he justified the annexation of Czechoslovakia with a customary right stemming from the thousand-year-long shared German-Czech history, and on the other hand, with the constant threat posed by French or Russian use of Czech military airfields against Germany. Then – and this is significant for the further course of events in the years 1939-1940 – Hitler settles accounts with the “virtuous” British.

"If an English statesman today believes that all problems can and must be solved through frank promises and negotiations, then I would simply like to say to that statesman: There was 15 years before our time for that! If the world today says that one must divide peoples into virtuous nations and those that are not virtuous—and the English and French belong primarily to the virtuous nations, and the Germans and Italians to the not-virtuous ones—then we can only answer: The judgment of whether a people is virtuous or not... should be left to God. ... By what means did the virtuous nations acquire a quarter of the world? ... They were not virtuous methods. For 300 years, this England acted only as an unvirtuous nation, only to now, in its old age, speak of virtue." The barbs against England and France, given both countries' recent colonial acquisitions only two decades prior, were not entirely unjustified, but Hitler continued his speech with a critical error. He described the British offer to Poland, proposed the previous day, as a sign of the encirclement of the German Reich and threatened to renounce the Anglo-German Naval

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Agreement of 1935 should a military treaty be concluded between Warsaw and London. Great Britain's power and global empire rested on naval superiority, and Hitler struck a raw nerve with full force. When he actually carried out his threat a few days later, he severed the bridge he himself had built four years earlier on the path to an understanding with Great Britain. England now had one more reason to wage war against Germany.

This Wilhelmshaven speech is particularly alarming to the leadership in Germany. Kriegsmarine, which immediately recognized the growing danger of a British-German attack-

⁵¹ Domarus, Volume 2, page 1121

The confrontation is looming, and one that considers the fact that the USA, with its sympathies, always sides with England. The Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Raeder, takes his responsibility as advisor to Chancellor Hitler very seriously and repeatedly tells him that Germany is not up to a naval war with Great Britain. He warns against provoking the British in any way. And Hitler assures Raeder each time that he will not let it come to war with England. Göring also advises Hitler to avoid taking the wrong steps towards Great Britain. He receives the same reassuring answers as Grand Admiral Raeder.

In a few official appearances in the following period, Hitler repeated this tactic. He accused the British of their own sins while simultaneously courting their partnership. The top generals and admirals warned Hitler, but they respected his political decisions. They hoped that Hitler would not overplay his hand. According to their view, after a final solution to the still unresolved Danzig question, there was nothing left to settle. Even after the secret meeting of May 5th, recorded by Hossbach,

By November 1937, seemingly nothing further was on the table. According to the Wehrmacht leadership, the promises of greater living space had already been fulfilled with the annexations of Austria and Czechoslovakia. There was no talk of a war against the Soviet Union. And Hitler had consistently stated that he wanted to avoid wars against France or England, even if he considered them inevitable in the long run. Thus, for the generals and admirals, the Wilhelmshaven speech currently only raised the issue of Adolf Hitler's risky recklessness as a politician, not an intention to unleash a new world war. For them, the protection of the German Reich remained the role for which they had built and armed the new Wehrmacht.

Hitler's speech of April 28, 1939, which has already been mentioned earlier in this book, also deserves mention here. On April 14, US President Roosevelt had sent Hitler a letter, urging him, "out of concern for all the other peoples of the Western Hemisphere," not to attack 31 specifically named states for the next 10, or better yet, 25 years. Roosevelt had also proposed negotiations on disarmament. Hitler responded with the aforementioned Reichstag speech, stating that the German Reich had disarmed ten years prior, that the victorious powers had failed to fulfill their treaty obligations to disarm as well, and he referred to his own disarmament proposals, all of which the victors, from their position of strength at the time, had rejected. Hitler then sarcastically asked Roosevelt why he—Hitler—should also guarantee the independence of the Republic of Ireland, when Irish President de Valera had just complained that Ireland was suffering under "continual aggression from England." 313



Fig. 8: Adolf Hitler during his reply speech on April 28, 1939

Hitler's Luftwaffe adjutant von Below writes about this Reichstag speech:

"Hitler's Reichstag speech on April 28th was like a political explosion." The officials of the Foreign Office chose the expression. ... The view that it was one of Hitler's best speeches was widespread in Germany. ... In a small circle at the Reich Chancellery, Hitler spoke seriously and bitterly. It had become increasingly clear to him that the enmity of the Western democracies was not directed solely at the National Socialist government in Germany, but at the entire German people. ...

*The termination of the treaties with Poland and England alarmed large sections of the population and Hitler's inner circle. Thus,*⁵³

Hitler poisoned the foreign policy climate with a series of explosive speeches, which, while understandable from the perspective of the time, were politically extremely damaging. After all, Hitler had agreed to Roosevelt's disarmament proposals of 1933, but the victorious powers had not. After all, between 1919 and 1939, the USA had invaded Nicaragua, the Soviet Union had invaded Manchuria in China, and the Norwegians had invaded Greenland in Denmark. Finally, during this period, the Dutch had brutally suppressed the independence movement in the Dutch East Indies, and the French had done the same in Morocco and S

⁵³ v. Below, pages 162 f today

⁵⁴ Indonesia

and what the British did in India. And finally, England had partitioned Egypt, Sudan, and Ireland during those years against the will of the governments there. Thus, Hitler's complaints about the interference of the British and the Americans "in the name of the peoples of the western hemisphere" are not entirely unfounded.

Hitler's speech to the commanders on February 10, 1939

Now, let us consider the lecture that Hitler delivered to the army's troop commanders in Berlin on February 10, 1939.⁵⁵ With this lecture, Hitler once again lifts the veil that conceals his intentions, albeit a little, without revealing any concrete plans. He reiterates his concept of Lebensraum (living space), without, however, disclosing which territories he has in mind. He speaks of his concerns about Germany's food supply, population growth, maintaining living standards, and the shortage of grain, ores, and timber, and he outlines possible solutions: increased imports and exports, birth control, emigration, or adapting Lebensraum to the needs of the rapidly growing population. He rejects increased pressure on the world market, because that, he argues, was the underlying cause of the last war. Hitler rules out birth control and emigration as viable solutions. Thus, Hitler announces his intention to "solve the German space problem."

"It is not my aim, gentlemen, to wage war, but rather my aim is to enforce the inescapable demands and necessities of German life, by all means, that is, to speak with Clausewitz, by the means of politics, ... and if necessary, also by the means of the sword. ... Therefore, do not be surprised if, in the coming years, every opportunity is taken to achieve some German goal, and then, please, stand behind me in faithful trust."

Hitler makes it clear here that he does not shy away from war, but he leaves open, for anyone who does not accept war as ⁵⁶

a means of politics, a glimmer of hope that things will not come to the worst when he says: *"This is also what, in my conviction, is most suitable for mitigating any such danger, for shortening the duration of wars, and above all, for*

avoiding wars altogether under certain circumstances."

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⁵⁵ Federal Archives, document NS 11/28 and Müller KJ, pages 365-375

⁵⁶ Müller KJ, pages 374 f

⁵⁷ Müller KJ, page 374

So now every listening army commander knows what motivates Hitler beyond the revision of the Treaty of Versailles. He also knows that he considers any means justified, even war. Every listening commander is warned from this point on. But even in this speech, Hitler again did not speak of "living space in the East," of Poland, Ukraine, or the Soviet Union. Thus, Hitler's speech remains a volatile political declaration and not a concrete war plan. When Czechoslovakia is annexed as a protectorate of the Reich and the German economic sphere a good month later, some of the listeners from February 10th may have believed that this was already the fulfillment of Hitler's living space idea.

Hitler's speech of May 23, 1939 and the Schmundt Protocol

Just over three months after that lecture to the army commanders, Hitler speaks again in a secret conference before the leaders of the three branches of the Wehrmacht.

This speech of May 23, 1939, is highly controversial in both meaning and content. It is the second of the aforementioned "key speeches" with which the Nuremberg Military Tribunal attempted to prove to the accused generals and admirals their "joint planning of a war and conspiracy against peace."⁵⁸

It should be noted that, in this case too, no verbatim transcript of the speech exists. Lieutenant Colonel Schmudt, Hitler's adjutant in the Wehrmacht at the time, wrote it down from memory sometime after the meeting.

On the first page of his notes, he states "paraphrased," indicating that he is not adhering to Hitler's exact wording.

Grand Admiral Raeder, confronted with the Schmudt transcript at the Nuremberg Trials, stated in court: *"In my opinion, it is the most*

unclear document concerning a speech by Hitler that exists, because a large part of the statements, in my view, makes no sense at all. ...In this particular case, it in no way accurately reflects the character of the speech." We readers, however, are dependent on this single transcript of that Hitler speech.⁵⁹

On May 23, 1939, Hitler summoned the commanders-in-chief of the Wehrmacht branches and their chiefs of staff to the Reich Chancellery to inform them of two things: first, that he wanted a special study staff established at his own disposal within the High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW). This staff was to investigate the conditions that would govern future wars. And second—

⁵⁸ IMT Document 079-L/US-27 and Domarus, Volume 2, pages 1196 ff.

⁵⁹ IMT Proceedings, Volume XIV, pages 48 f

tens he announces that he intends to eliminate Poland as a potential enemy behind Germany's back at the first favorable opportunity.

To understand this speech, one must recall the recent developments up to May 1939. In January, the German and Polish governments negotiated to reach a solution to the Polish Corridor and Danzig questions. In March 1939, Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia as a protectorate of the German Reich. Poland, which had annexed a portion of Czechoslovakia in October 1938, now believed it no longer needed a compromise with the Germans and refused to continue negotiations regarding Danzig. Poland seized the opportunity and switched sides to the British and French. At the same time, the oppression of the German minority in Poland resurfaced. Since February, anti-German demonstrations had been increasing in Polish cities, and the large number of Polish attacks against Germans outraged the population in the Reich.

German-Polish relations, which before the occupation of Czechoslovakia had still given rise to hopes for understanding, now began to boil over. Hitler was clearly furious about the opportunity he himself had squandered and about the Polish reaction. He attributed the Polish refusal to continue negotiations over Danzig to the British offer to protect Poland from the German demand for Danzig. Thus, Hitler's anger at this time was directed primarily against the British and the Poles. On April 3, 1939, Hitler instructed the OKW (High Command of the Armed Forces) to prepare a campaign against Poland in the event that Poland should escalate its stance towards the German Reich.

In this situation, Hitler informed the top generals of his view on foreign policy and, in a rather confused speech, outlined how Germany should proceed militarily. This address—as it has been "paraphrased"—is more aggressive than any other before the war. Several gruesomely martial passages are indeed suitable for quotation, but whether they actually originated with Hitler is unknown.

The speech does not reveal an overall plan for a new world war. However, it does reveal many things: firstly, that Hitler, in view of the rearmament of almost all states in Europe, considers a new war inevitable. Secondly, that Thirdly, he believes Germany needs more space for agriculture and mineral resources. Thirdly, he will attack Poland at the first opportunity and eliminate it as a potential enemy behind Germany's back. Fourthly, he hopes to avoid wars with other European states for a long time to come.

In this lengthy speech, Hitler specifically addresses three points. He wants his own study staff at the OKW (High Command of the Armed Forces). He wants to attack Poland "at the first suitable opportunity," and he wants to be ready for a major conflict in Europe by 1943 or 1944.

⁶⁰ Archive of the Present, page 3962

The concept of Lebensraum (living space) would not have seemed as absurd to the generals in 1939 as it does to the reader today. In the 1930s, Italy and Japan attempted to acquire colonies or colonial holdings by force, and Poland through negotiation, to gain settlement space for their rapidly growing populations. The Lebensraum problem, which England, France, the Soviet Union, the USA, and others had long since solved for themselves through colonies or expansion, was a topic of discussion among the colonial powers not only in Germany.

Back to Hitler's speech. The entire logic of this speech, as Schmundt transcribed it from memory, jumps around somewhat. With a somewhat reconstructed order of thought and in Schmundt's words, Hitler develops the following chain of reasoning before the generals: • The victors would have maintained the balance of power in Europe without Germany determined.

• Germany's re-entry into the circle of powerful states disrupts this

Balance. • All

German demands would be considered an "incursion." • England feared its economic threat. • Germany's economic problems had to be solved. • Colonies were not a solution to the food problem. The routes to them could be blocked by England at sea. • Without incursions into foreign states or attacks on foreign property, no solution to the economic problems was possible. • Germany would be left with the choice between rise or fall.

Hitler then shifts his thoughts to the role of Poland: • Poland will always stand on the side of our enemies. Despite the friendship agreement, Poland has always intended to exploit every opportunity against us. • The "Poland" problem is therefore contingent on the confrontation with the West cannot be separated.

• Will fate force us to confront the West, be it

It's good to have a large eastern room.

• Gdansk is not the object at stake. For us, it is about expanding living space in the east and ensuring food security. • Therefore, the question of sparing Poland is moot, and the decision remains to treat Poland to attack at the first suitable opportunity.

• There must not be a simultaneous conflict with France and England.

• If it was not certain that England and France would remain uninvolved in a German-Polish conflict, the fight would primarily be directed against the two aforementioned countries.

⁶¹ Poland's Foreign Minister Beck presented this on January 26, 1939, to the delegation accredited in Warsaw. Foreign press report. See Archive of the Present, page 3905.

Hitler's thoughts on England and France now follow. • Hitler doubts the possibility of a peaceful resolution with England.

England sees Germany's development as the foundation for a hegemony that would weaken England. Therefore, England is our enemy, and confronting it is a matter of life and death.

- It is not about right or wrong, but about being or not being.

After this long chain of thoughts, Hitler's speech begins to circle back on itself. He says that •

England can only be dealt a decisive blow if one does not slide into a war with England through Poland, and • that he hopes that England and France will not get involved in a German-Polish war. intervened in the war.

- Thus, a long war, as well as a surprise attack, to destroy the to prepare for English opportunities on the mainland.

So what – the listening generals must ask themselves – does Hitler actually want? Lebensraum in the East, and if so, where should it be? War with England and France, or war with Poland, or both? In any case, he does not want war with England, France, and Poland at the same time, and – this deserves to be emphasized – he only wants to destroy "England's possibilities on the continent" and not to infringe upon England's global empire.

After outlining his strategic intentions, Hitler states that he now needs a study staff at the OKW (High Command of the Armed Forces) to examine the conditions for such wars. Hitler then elaborates at length on the work and independence of this new staff from the general staffs of the three branches of the Wehrmacht. When Field Marshal Göring asks at the end of the meeting what the branches of the Wehrmacht should now do and when war should be expected, Adolf Hitler simply replies that the armament programs should be geared towards 1943 or 1944.⁶² This does not sound like an invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.

So far, Hitler's second "key speech" was delivered on May 23, 1939, to the commanders-in-chief and chiefs of staff of the army, air force, and navy.

According to accounts, the generals and admirals did not leave the meeting with the impression that Hitler would soon start a war. Even though the statement "to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity" might suggest otherwise, Hitler's concluding remark about a possible start to the war in 1943 or 1944 dispels this impression.

⁶² Domarus, Volume 2, page 1201

Seven weeks before the speech, Poland had rejected any concessions on the Polish Corridor and Danzig issues, and England had encouraged Poland in this stance with an offer of alliance. Since then, Hitler had issued the following directive to the Wehrmacht for the event of "White": 63 *"German relations with*

Poland will continue to be governed by the principle of avoiding disturbances. Should Poland change its policy, which has hitherto been based on the same principle, and adopt a stance that threatens the Reich, a final reckoning may become necessary. ..."

The handling of the "White" case must be carried out in such a way that its implementation is possible at any time from September 1, 1939 onwards."

The generals and admirals considered a war to recapture Danzig and the Polish Corridor in the summer of 1939 to be justified in principle. Nevertheless, without exception, they all preferred a negotiated solution to the problem because they foresaw the repercussions with France and Great Britain. Should war with Poland break out and the Wehrmacht achieve victory, the future status of the formerly German provinces of Posen and West Prussia, according to the prevailing military opinion at the time, was a matter of high politics. The notion that these territories constituted the "living space in the East" that Hitler frequently spoke of was not far-fetched in this context. However, no one in Hitler's speech of May 23rd apparently considered the annexation of all of Poland. Hitler's digression on the concept of living space in the East in this speech was so vague and unspecific that it subsequently had no influence on the further planning of the three branches of the Wehrmacht regarding Poland, nor did it give rise to any further discussion. But in the weeks and months following the speech, the commanders-in-chief of the three branches of the Wehrmacht repeatedly warned Hitler against misjudging England and France. However, he consistently reassured them, stating that "he had things firmly under control politically,"⁶⁴ "he would not let it come to war against England," or expressing similar sentiments.

The speech of May 23, 1939, is in parts rambling and vague, but it reveals Hitler's suspicion that England would oppose Germany's further strengthening with war. From this, Hitler developed his obsessive belief that war with England was inevitable, that he had to further arm Germany for it, and that it might even be advantageous to start the war with England itself. Poland, he argued, was "merely" the country that had now taken the wrong side and therefore had to be eliminated. This interpretation was confirmed within three months when, shortly before the outbreak of war, England offered Germany a partnership treaty, and Hitler indicated his willingness to call off the Polish campaign in return. However, England did not honor the offer, and so the war with Poland began. This is the subject of the following chapter.

⁶³ Hitler's directive of April 3, 1939. See dtv Hitler's Directives, pages 19ff;

⁶⁴ Raeder, Volume 2, page 163

The second key speech again reveals to the generals that Hitler is prepared to wage war to expand German living space. But he reveals neither when nor how this will be done. The generals' reaction shows that they do not support Hitler in this type of policy.

Hitler's speech of August 22, 1939, and the seven protocols

Hitler delivered his third key speech before the war on August 22, 1939, just over a week before the outbreak of war. He had summoned the leaders of the army groups and armies of the three branches of the Wehrmacht to his Obersalzberg residence.⁶⁵ He ordered to brief them on the foreign policy situation and to prepare them for the campaign against Poland.

Since the beginning of 1939, Hitler's efforts regarding Danzig and the Polish Corridor had stalled. He had offered Poland negotiations and ultimately threatened war. At the start of his speech, the officers who had traveled to the Berghof did not know whether Hitler was truly prepared to wage war over Danzig or whether he was bluffing. At that time, they could only speculate. The day before Hitler's speech, a sensation occurred. Stalin invited Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop to Moscow to conclude treaties. Hitler could now expect an agreement with Russia that would guarantee him that the Soviet Union would not intervene on Poland's behalf in the event of a German-Polish war. In this new situation, a last-minute change of heart by the Polish government was not entirely improbable, especially since a reasonable compromise proposal from the German side was still on the table. The overarching question hanging over that meeting at the Berghof was: agreement with Poland or war?

The speech Hitler gave in this tense situation could reveal whether he truly wanted war at any cost, or whether he was using the massive pressure of the threat of war to try to wrest the German city of Danzig from Poland. Even this large deployment of generals at the Berghof, which did not go unnoticed abroad, could serve to increase the pressure on Poland.

Hitler begins his speech by declaring that he has now decided to wage war against Poland. However, since talks between the Reich government and Poland are ongoing, it is quite possible that these words, too, are merely part of Hitler's threatening scenario. In the case of Czechoslovakia, six months earlier, Hitler had achieved his goal simply by announcing his intention to invade. Not a single shot was fired. Thus, despite Hitler's unequivocal declaration, the generals remain uncertain about what will actually happen.

⁶⁵ Hitler's residence outside Berlin, near Salzburg

The significance of the speech lies elsewhere. This address to the generals is probably Hitler's most frequently quoted speech. No fewer than seven transcripts and protocols of it exist, some of which differ considerably from one another.

Everyone agrees that Hitler provided a detailed justification for his decision to wage war against Poland. According to all the records, Hitler considered a confrontation with England and France unavoidable in the long run. He believed that in such a case, Poland would side with the opposing powers and thus betray Germany. Therefore, given the current tense situation, he considered it better to wage the conflict with Poland as soon as possible.

Hitler explained his view of the situation in Great Britain and France, concluding that both countries would not actually resort to arms in the event of an immediate German attack on Poland. He also assessed the European heads of state and government who could influence events. He concluded his speech with the idea that a swift German victory would help prevent the conflict from escalating. These are the few points that are consistently mentioned in all the transcripts and records.

It is noteworthy that in some transcripts, Hitler's speech is recorded in a vulgar manner, including mentions of far-reaching war aims, while in others it is expressed in a sober and factual way, notably omitting the quotations that report on Hitler's war intentions against France, England, and the Soviet Union. This leaves open the question of which transcripts are accurate. It is possible that some recorders omitted important information to conceal it. It is also possible that others supplemented and embellished the speech in such a way that the transcripts provide clearer "proof" of the far-reaching war intentions of Hitler and the German generals. If the "sharp" versions of the speech transcripts are inaccurate, it would be disastrous, because they, and only they, have entered the historical record. Since the Nuremberg Trials, they have shaped the image that is held in Germany and around the world of the early complicity of the German general staff. Thus, what Adolf Hitler actually said on this 22nd of August 1939 is of crucial importance for proving the complicity of the generals or for exonerating them.

Comparing the transcripts is like reading a scene from a detective novel.

The seven transcripts of the Obersalzberg speech disappeared into various files in 1939 and reappeared as "evidence" at the Nuremberg Trials in 1945.

The Nuremberg prosecution first presented an alleged original document⁶⁶ that reproduced Hitler's statements in particularly brutal, vulgar, and grotesque terms. The "document" was leaked to US prosecutor Alderman by an American journalist⁶⁷. It was then included in the

⁶⁶ IMT Document 03-L/US-28

⁶⁷ IMT Proceedings, Volume XIV, page 76

The case was introduced as evidence, but then immediately rejected. The forgery is too obvious. This false version, not recognized by the court, boasts quotations and descriptions such as:

"Decision to attack Poland in the spring. ... I'll have

anyone shot who utters even a word of criticism. ... The war aim is not reaching certain lines, but the physical annihilation of the enemy. ... Poland will be depopulated and resettled with Germans. ... After Stalin's death, we will break up the Soviet Union. Then German domination of the earth will dawn." According to the false version, Hitler continues: "My only worry is that Chamberlain or some other scoundrel will come to me at the last minute with proposals and change his mind. He'll fly down the stairs. And if I have to personally kick him in the stomach in front of all the photographers. ... Whether the world believes it, I don't give a damn. ..."

The citizens of Western Europe must be trembling with horror. ... And now, let's go after the enemy! We'll celebrate our reunion in Warsaw! ... The speech was received with enthusiasm. Göring climbed onto the table. Bloodthirsty thanks and a bloodthirsty promise. He danced around like a madman." So much for the first false version. 68

Fatal for defeated Germany was the fact that the prosecution, **after** rejecting this vulgar and brutal "Wild West version" of Hitler's speech as a forgery for use as evidence, had 250 copies made and distributed to the foreign press represented in Nuremberg. A propaganda coup by the victors against the vanquished. For the media worldwide, this was the "revelation" of how Hitler spoke to the generals and that he harbored plans for world conquest, which he had not concealed.⁶⁹ US prosecutor Alderman subsequently described this process, which one can hardly believe was merely an oversight, laconically before the court as "some kind of technical error."⁷⁰

As unworthy as this error is of the International Tribunal, its impact on historiography in Germany and the world is lasting. In the official documentation of British foreign policy, the "Documents on British Foreign Policy," for example, this and only this false version is perpetuated.⁷¹ Even today, quotations from that false version are used. After the war, even the editors of the printed and published files of the Foreign Office did not hesitate to include the false version alongside a second, equally dubious variant in the "Documents on German Foreign Policy," thus preserving it as a so-called document.⁷²

⁶⁸ IMT Document 03-L/US-28, e.g.,

⁶⁹ Neuer Hannoverscher Kurier, newsletter of the Allied Military Government, number 47 of November 27, 1945, pages 1 and 3

⁷⁰ IMT Proceedings, Volume II, page 327;

⁷¹ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Annex to Document 314; ADAP, Series D,

⁷² Volume VII, pages 171/172

The next transcript of this Hitler speech that the court uses as evidence is a two-part document.⁷³ It has neither a header nor a date, no file number, no diary number, no confidentiality mark, and it bears no signature. In court, no one can say who wrote it or where it came from.⁷⁴ Later, the prosecution even contradicts itself with two different places of origin. The defense attorney for Grand Admiral Raeder, Dr.

Siemers, as can be read in the Nuremberg court records, pointed out to the military tribunal that the first half of this new document was written on the same paper and with the same typewriter as the first false version, which had already been withdrawn by the prosecutors.⁷⁵ However, the court did not accept this as a reason to doubt the reliability and authenticity of the document and insisted on the evidentiary value of the paper.

The explosive aspect of this second document, as with the first, lies in the cynical statements and turns of phrase—allegedly from Hitler—which, if indeed uttered as such, severely compromise the listening generals. The second version is now reprinted in all major German history works and document collections.⁷⁶ School history and civics textbooks, using the most striking quotations from this “document,” convey to students that Hitler wanted war with Poland at any cost, and that the German generals silently and tacitly accepted this.

In the archive of Hitler speeches compiled by the archive director Dr. Max Domarus, this second version is presented as the most faithful reproduction of that speech and is printed in its entirety. Domarus comments on this as follows: *“There is no doubt about its*

authenticity, since two other transcripts of this speech exist: the record by General Admiral Hermann Boehm and the diary entry of Colonel General Halder.”

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Domarus is mistaken here, because it was General Admiral Boehm who exposed this second version as a forgery by comparing it with his own protocol.

On August 22, 1939, at the Berghof on the Obersalzberg, General Admiral Boehm was one of Adolf Hitler's listeners. He took notes of the speech, recording Hitler's key points verbatim. That same evening, he compiled his protocol from these notes; this protocol is the third one mentioned in this book. Boehm gave the protocol to his superior, Raeder. Raeder read it, confirmed its accuracy, and initialed the document. Six and a half years later, on May 16, 1946, in Nuremberg, Raeder was involved in the second round of negotiations.

⁷³ IMT documents 798-PS/US-29 (first half of speech) and 1014-PS/US-30 (second half of speech)

⁷⁴ IMT Proceedings, Volume XIV, page 55; e.g.,

⁷⁵ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, pages 167 ff. and

⁷⁶ Domarus, Volume 2, pages 1233 ff. and Jacobsen, pages 98 ff.

⁷⁷ Domarus, Volume 2, page 1233

When confronted with this version of Hitler's speech, he immediately states that many of the formulations in this "protocol" are incorrect. Words – according to Raeder – such as *"Destruction of Poland is paramount. The goal is the elimination of vital forces, not the achievement of a specific line" or "Closing their hearts to compassion, brutal action"*

had not fallen.⁷⁸ He argues that the German commanders-in-chief would not have tolerated the mention of such a war aim at the outbreak of war. Raeder recalls the Boehm Protocol and demands that the Admiral General be heard as a witness. Raeder's lawyer, Dr. Siemers, moves to summon Boehm as a witness. The judges refuse. Thereupon, Dr. Siemers hears Boehm, prepares a transcript of the hearing, and has the Admiral General give a sworn statement. Siemers then submits both the transcript of the hearing and the statement to the Nuremberg court as exonerating document "Raeder No. 129."⁷⁹ It is interesting to note that although Boehm's hearing is listed in the court's record of proceedings with the date, subject matter, and document number, it does not appear in the IMT's volume of documents. It is missing. The Nuremberg judges avoided including the dismantling of her "key speech" as evidence in the official record. However, the very revealing testimony of the Admiral General is preserved in its entirety in the papers of Raeder's defense attorney, Dr. Siemers. It is well worth reading.

Boehm compares the second version, which Raeder doubts, with his own written record and states for the record:

"I declare under oath that the phrases listed below in these documents were either not used at all by Hitler in his speech, or were used in a different form and with a different meaning." He then goes through the controversial passages in the disputed "piece of evidence" one by one. The alleged Hitler quotations are introduced below with "2nd version," the witness's statements with "Boehm."⁸⁰

Version 2: *"I made the decision back in the spring, but thought that I would first turn against the West in a few years and only then against the East."*

Boehm: *In particular, the phrase that Hitler would first turn against the West, which would have expressed an intention to attack the Western powers, was never used.*

Version 2: *"My initial goal was to establish a workable relationship with Poland, to fight against the West first."*

Boehm: *"The sentence was not used. The same applies as stated before, that Hitler in no way expressed an intention to fight against the West."*

⁷⁸ IMT Negotiations, Volume XIV, page 56

⁷⁹ Siemers, Document Book VI, pages 3 ff

⁸⁰ Siemers, Document Book VI, pages 3-10, document Raeder-129

Version 2: *"We have nothing to lose, only to gain."* Boehm: *"That sentence wasn't needed."*

Version 2: *"My opponents hadn't reckoned with my great determination. Our opponents are little worms. I saw them in Munich."*

Boehm: *"Both sentences, especially the assessment of the opponents, were not needed."*

Version 2: *"I'm just afraid that some swine will present me with a mediation proposal at the last minute. The political objective continues. The first step towards destroying England's supremacy has been taken."*

Boehm: *"Neither the statement regarding the mediation proposal, nor especially regarding the destruction of England's supremacy, was ever uttered. They are outright fabrications, just like the word 'swine'."*

Version 2: *"The primary goal is the destruction of Poland. The aim is the elimination of living forces, not the achievement of a specific line."*

Boehm: *"There was never any talk of the destruction of Poland or the elimination of the living forces of the Polish people as such, but always only of the breaking of the military forces."*

Version 2: *"The complete destruction of Poland is the military goal."* Boehm: *"That sentence was certainly not spoken."*

Version 2: *"Closing one's heart to compassion" – "Brutal action".*

Boehm: *"Hitler never called for brutal action in his speech. The call for harshness referred, in both wording and meaning, to the conduct of the fight against the enemy Wehrmacht as well as to the deployment of one's own troops to bring the conflict to a swift end."*

Version 2: *"New German border management based on sound principles, 'Possibly a protectorate as a buffer zone.'"*

Boehm: *"It was only a later new border demarcation that was mentioned, not a protectorate."*

And so on and so forth.

The Admiral General concludes his sworn statement before Grand Admiral Raeder's lawyer, Dr. Siemers, with the concluding remark that he considers the "particularly incriminating passages to be subsequent additions or errors." Boehm's own transcript, the third speech transcript in the numbering of this book, begins with *"Purpose of the discussion..."*

Hitler's intention (81) as recently as spring was to postpone the solution to the Polish question, to put it on ice, so to speak, in order to first wage what he considered the inevitable conflict in the West. However, as a politician, one cannot commit to a timeline; one must be flexible. The conditions for his original intentions had changed; moreover, he had never believed that Poland would have adhered to the non-aggression pact if Germany were otherwise bound.

Even if this confrontation with Poland was undesirable, it was necessary, and the political situation for Germany was now more favorable than perhaps in a few years." According to Boehm's transcript, Hitler explains ⁸²

his motives for an imminent war against Poland in this speech. After introductory remarks on the current situation of the British Empire, France, Italy, and Spain, he turns to Poland:

"It is clear from the outset that a political situation with Poland as it now existed is untenable in the long run. Hence the Führer's proposal regarding the cession of Danzig and the establishment of a connecting route through the corridor. This attempt at understanding was disrupted by England, which worked itself into a frenzy and incited Poland to send insolent notes and take military action. ... For England, however, a permanently unstable state was and is precisely what is desired, so that it can unleash Poland on the other side at any time should it wish to strike itself. ... Faulty compromises would be unacceptable. ... In the Führer's view, the probability of intervention by the Western powers in a conflict is not high."

Then, according to the Boehm Protocol, Hitler explains why he does not expect intervention from the Western powers and why the Soviet Union has so suddenly turned away from England and France and towards Germany in this German-Polish conflict. Boehm's Protocol continues:

"Of course, in a conflict between Germany and Poland, the Western powers will try to save face. They might recall ambassadors, perhaps impose a trade embargo. The only thing that will help against this is the most unwavering resolve. ..."

Furthermore, one must consider that there are also people on the other side with their worries and concerns. Ultimately, it's not machines that are struggling against each other, but people. And we have the better people.

The goal is the elimination and destruction of Poland's military forces. ...

⁸¹ Author's note

⁸² IMT protocol volume XLI, document Raeder-27

*Providence has made us leaders of this (German⁸³) people;
Our task is therefore to provide the German people, who are crammed together
at a density of 140 people per square kilometer, with the necessary living
space. ..."*

Boehm makes no mention whatsoever of Hitler's plans to later attack France or England, of the "complete destruction of Poland" or even of a "German domination of the earth" (in the first version).

Of particular importance is the reported Hitler quote from that second version, whose author is unknown: *"I am only afraid that at the last moment some swine will present me with a mediation plan."*

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This quote still haunts school history and civics textbooks,⁸⁵ as it proves that Hitler now wants war with Poland at any price and is no longer interested in a solution to the Polish Corridor and Danzig questions. In the first erroneous version, the "scoundrel" is still called a "little pig." This fateful sentence is not found in Boehm, Halder, or Greiner (5th version). In Boehm's version, it reads instead: *"Foul compromises would be unacceptable."*

The phrase "swine" is significant because Hitler requested the British government to mediate with the Poles on the following day, August 23, 1939, as well as on August 25, 26, and 29. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. The phrase "swine" was intended to prove in Nuremberg in 1946 that Hitler's requests for mediation with the British government were merely a ruse.

This may also be the reason why the Nuremberg judges are resisting summoning Boehm as a witness.

Archive director Dr. Domarus decides to include the second version, whose author and origin are unknown, in the archive of Hitler's speeches, and not the Boehm version. He justifies this *by stating that "they are formulated*

more concisely than those by Boehm and Halder."
*even though they have the same content."*⁸⁶

Domarus was evidently misled by the "concise" but dubious formulations, and he uses precisely two witnesses who contradict his logic. Neither Boehm with his own protocol nor the Chief of the Army General Staff, General Halder, with his diary entry (4th version)⁸⁷ confirm the many compromising formulations attributed to Hitler in that second version of the Nuremberg protocol.

⁸³ Author's note ADAP, Series

⁸⁴ D, Volume VII, page 170 e.g.:

⁸⁵ Gebhardt, Volume 4/2, page 499

⁸⁶ Domarus, Volume 2, page

⁸⁷ 1233 ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, pages 467 ff and Halder, Volume 1, pages 23 ff

Another protocol, the fifth in the numbering of this book, is found in the war diary of OKW 88, written by the diary's keeper, Helmuth Greiner. This protocol confirms Boehm on almost all points. It only corrects the admiral insofar as Hitler apparently did speak of destroying England's hegemony, but not—as suggested in the second version—as Hitler's political program, but merely as a mention of a fact. And Greiner confirms that Hitler did indeed speak of possibly making Poland a protectorate.

Even Field Marshal von Manstein, an audience member of this Hitler speech, later wrote that Hitler had not used many of the phrases attributed to him at that time.⁸⁹ Grand Admiral Raeder testified in Nuremberg: *"The words were certainly not uttered, as far as*

I can recall. The Führer did not usually use such expressions in speeches he gave to the generals."

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The same is confirmed by Field Marshal Keitel⁹¹.

In addition to the five versions of transcripts of this explosive and frequently quoted Hitler speech already mentioned, a sixth version by General Liebmann and a seventh by General Admiral Albrecht have been preserved. These two versions are not verbatim transcripts.

The supposed proof of authenticity from Domarus is therefore no proof at all. The second version, printed in the files of the German Foreign Office and in the Domarus archive, whose authorship remains unknown, is clearly just as much a forgery as the first. Given Dr. Siemers' observation that the questionable document was partly typed on the same typewriter as the first forged version, it could very well have been written by the same forger who produced the first "vulgar" version.

The second version serves in Nuremberg as "proof" that Hitler informed the general staff on that 22nd August 1939 that he was only conducting the negotiations with Poland as a sham, that he wanted war and territorial conquest at any price, and that he intended to attack Great Britain and France later.

When Hitler assembled the army group and army commanders of the three branches of the Wehrmacht at his Alpine residence, the Obersalzberg, on August 22nd, the high-ranking officers knew that negotiations with Poland regarding Danzig and the Polish Corridor had been ongoing since January. They were aware of the tensions with France and Great Britain that Hitler himself had created by subjugating Czechoslovakia in March. They were also aware of the countless attacks against the German-

⁸⁸ KTB-OKW, Document Appendix, page 947

⁸⁹ v. Manstein, page 19

⁹⁰ IMT Proceedings, Volume XIV, page 59

⁹¹ Keitel, page 247

The Polish minority in Poland is aware of the many border violations by Poland, and they know that German divisions are massing against Poland. In this situation, the generals and admirals await information about what awaits them.

Based on the transcripts of Greiner, Boehm, and Halder, Hitler told the generals on August 22, 1939, nothing more and nothing less than that, after months of fruitless negotiations with Poland, he intended to take military action shortly. He omitted his own mistake of occupying Czechoslovakia six months earlier, a mistake that had caused Poland's rigid stance. However, the speech contained nothing that might have surprised the generals in such a tense situation. At least, they heard nothing about Hitler's further plans to later attack France, England, Russia, or anyone else. If this is the case—and there is little doubt about it—then the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, with its two distorted transcripts, was not searching for the truth but for incriminating evidence. And the tribunal left us and German schoolchildren a dubious legacy. The "striking" quotations from the second version persist to this day in school history and civics textbooks.

Complicity and complicity of the German people

A comprehensive review of all of Hitler's interviews and speeches between 1933 and the beginning of the war against Poland initially presents a somewhat unclear picture. There are the public speeches in which Hitler advocated for peace in Europe until the outbreak of war, and there are the secret speeches given to closed circles.

mostly before high-ranking officers; in which he reveals his willingness to risk war. Hitler is clearly deceiving foreign countries and the German people with his peace speeches, and the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg is deceiving foreign countries and the German people about the true content of Hitler's secret speeches.

In retrospect, it is not entirely easy to discern whether Hitler initially only risked a war for the return of Danzig and the Corridor, whether he considered a later confrontation with the Western powers inevitable and was preparing for it, or whether he himself intended to unleash a war for German expansion. All postwar interpretations of "German living space in the East" are of little help in this regard. Hitler does not mention this in any of his speeches, not even those following the outbreak of war on September 1st, October 6th, and November 23rd.

⁹² e.g., in "Our History" Volume 4, page 128, cited as Diesterweg 1988; in "History and Events 10" Edition N, page 133, cited as Klett 1995; in "Handbook of German History" Volume 4/2, page 499, cited as Gebhardt; and in "Man Against Man," page 40, a book for Lower Saxony schools, cited as Nolte.

In November 1939, Hitler did not specify where he saw his oft-mentioned Lebensraum (living space) in the East. The generals, admirals, and ministers listening could only guess at the next "target"—Austria, Bohemia and Moravia, or the formerly German parts of Poland. Ukraine, his later target of conquest, was never mentioned by Hitler until July 1940.⁹³ Thus, the obvious manipulation of Hitler's secret speeches with formulations about offensive intentions against Great Britain and France or about the aspired-to "world domination" did more harm than good to the search for truth.

In late summer 1939, the German public had no grounds to infer from Hitler's speeches anything more than a war over Danzig and the Corridor. After Hitler's successful coups and threats in the Rhineland in 1936, in Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938, and in Czechoslovakia in 1939, they could even hope that Danzig, too, would return to the German Reich without war. The German public seemed to shrug off Hitler's earlier broken promises, such as "we don't want any Czechs at all," just as they usually do with broken political promises. They saw no warning signs. Thus, the German people could not infer from Hitler's speeches up to 1939 that their "Führer" would later lead them into a war for "living space in the East." Hitler had not revealed his hand to the German people as a whole through his public speeches. Therefore, one cannot attribute complicity or collective guilt to the German people as a whole.

Until 1937, the Reich ministers and top generals could not have observed Hitler's latent willingness to use the Wehrmacht for purposes other than defending Germany. The only indication of Hitler's later ambitions comes from his inaugural address to the Reichswehr on February 3, 1933, where the newly appointed Chancellor Hitler mentions that

Germany might need "living space in the East." After that, the issue was not raised again for a long time. This was followed by the construction of fortifications on the eastern border, the occupation of the Rhineland, which had previously been unprotected by German troops, and the construction of the West Wall. Even the reconstruction of the Wehrmacht in the early years of Hitler's rule was initially oriented solely toward the military advantage of France and Germany's neighboring states allied with France. None of this was considered a reason to fear wars of conquest under Hitler's rule.

Nevertheless, there are – and this should not be overlooked – also men in business, politics and the military who see the introduction of universal conscription, rearmament and the occupation of the Rhineland as the harbingers of a war policy and express this view.⁹⁴

⁹³ Even then, Hitler still spoke of a separate "Ukrainian Empire".

⁹⁴ Bross, page 84

The first clear indication of Hitler's intentions in a speech is found only in the conversation between Hitler, Foreign Minister von Neurath, and the Wehrmacht leadership on November 5, 1937, as recorded by Colonel Hoßbach. Hitler reveals that he wants to exploit the "opportunities" of future wars between the major European powers for Germany's benefit and that he intends to annex Austria and Czechoslovakia to the German Reich. This is not the forging of a war plan, as the Nuremberg court later accuses him of doing. The objections of Neurath and the generals only prove the opposite. But for the first time, Hitler drops his mask. Von Neurath draws the logical conclusion and requests to resign. The generals feel bound by the primacy of politics and try to dissuade Hitler from taking risks with their advice. This only leads to the conspiracy of seven army generals, already mentioned in Part 2 of the book, which has no effect because the Munich Agreement prevents an attack against Czechoslovakia.

In the three speeches to commanders and officers on February 10, 1939, May 23 (2nd key speech) and August 22 (3rd key speech), Hitler attempts to motivate the Wehrmacht's leadership corps to wage war.

He speaks of expanding living space and makes it clear that he considers a major war from 1943 onward inevitable. However, Hitler never reveals what he actually means by expanding living space.

Each of his speeches, when it becomes specific, lifts only the small piece of the veil that lies over the very next step. That is first Austria, then Czechoslovakia, then Poland. Hitler never fully revealed his hand.

Based on his speeches and interviews, it is also likely that concrete plans beyond his nebulous visions will only come to him with the early war successes and the opportunities that arise.⁹⁵

Hitler's cynical and brutal pronouncements and some of his declarations of intent appear to have originated from other sources, intended to provide the Nuremberg Tribunal with compelling evidence. These later altered texts were clearly unknown to the generals in 1939. The perceptions of Wehrmacht officers in 1939 revolved around what they could hear and see at the time. They observed the dramatically escalating tensions between the German Reich and Poland beginning in April 1939. Their complicity in the outbreak of a new world war must be assessed based on what they knew, observed, and heard in 1939.

Thus, the long road to the German-Polish-Russian conflict is more decisive for their complicity or innocence than Hitler's so-called key speeches.

⁹⁵ Hitler denied this in later speeches and claimed to have planned his actions well in advance.

PART 5

THE PATH TO THE GERMAN-POLISH-SOVIET WAR

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The outbreak of war

THE PATH TO THE GERMAN-POLISH-SOVIET WAR

Poland is in conflict with all its neighbors

The Polish drama of 1939 had been brewing ominously since 1918, in a brief but turbulent prehistory. The difficult process of redefining the territorial boundaries between the newly re-established Poland and its neighbors was foreshadowed in January 1918 by US President Wilson. In point 13 of his 14-point peace offer, he demanded that the defeated powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia establish a new Polish state. Point 13 reads:

*"An independent Polish state should be established, encompassing the territories inhabited by an indisputably Polish population, to which free and safe access to the sea should be guaranteed, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international agreements."*¹

The vague wording of this demand creates immense potential for conflict in all subsequent territorial and border arrangements that will apply to Poland and all its neighbors. The phrase "undeniably Polish population" leads Poles to expect that every territory inhabited by Poles will become Polish in the future. In Russia, Austria, Lithuania, and Germany, the term is more readily associated with territories where Poles constitute a majority. Wilson, too, clearly had Polish majorities in mind when he used the phrase "undeniably Polish population." Only in this way does his speech of July 4, 1918, in Mount Vernon make sense, in which he

"Popular participation in the regulation of any territorial, sovereignty, economic and political problems, while eliminating all foreign power interests."

It promises. Among the defeated peoples, the fact that this right to self-determination, promised by America in the Treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain, was not upheld, breeds bitterness from 1920 onwards. In the case of Danzig and the "corridor," the persistent violation of the right to self-determination triggers the Second World War.

The second potentially explosive phrase lies in the words "free and safe access to the sea." Wilson initially only meant mere rights of way, such as those granted to the new Czechoslovakia on the Elbe. But for the states that formed the new Poland at Versailles—

¹ Kern, page 27

The interpretation of Wilson's formulation is far from clear. They interpret it as encompassing the entire region of Pomerelia, including the city of Danzig. This interpretation of Wilson's formulation led the Polish government two decades later to adopt a rigid stance on the Danzig question. Since Germany guaranteed this free access from 1938 onward, even outside of Danzig, both the Poles and the Germans invoked point 13 of Wilson's tenets in 1939 and thus entered the war, both convinced they were in the right.

The newly founded state of Poland was granted land and people from its neighboring nations by the victorious powers of the First World War. Among them were many millions of people who were not Polish and did not wish to become Polish.



Map 17: Poland to Versailles and Saint-Germain

Nevertheless, the Poles were not satisfied with their territorial gains. During the negotiations on Poland's new borders, the Polish delegation leader in Versailles, Dmowski, declared that it should not be forgotten that the territories granted to the Polish state were "only a down payment on a truly Greater Poland."² The newly elected Polish government demanded for its new state all the territories that had been part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1772.³ It was irrelevant to them that Poland had ruled over many foreign peoples at that time. Even after the founding of the state, the issue of "Polish territories" remained relevant for the Poles for a long time. The future Deputy Prime Minister Grabski wrote in 1923, when he chaired the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the parliament in Warsaw:

"... Above all, Poland's power politics still faces the same fundamental dilemma that has plagued our entire history to date: the question of which direction should the expansion of the Polish people take? Northward toward the Baltic Sea or southeastward toward Ukraine and the Black Sea?... Either we direct Polish expansion eastward against Russia, taking advantage of the period of its powerlessness that the next half-century will bring... or we dedicate all the resources at our disposal to ensuring that the East Prussian question is resolved by Poland in Poland's favor. ...In recent history, there is no example of a nation relinquishing any of its constituent parts simply because they were currently located outside its borders. ..."

4

In 1918, the newly founded Poland – barely established – assembled a strong army from former German, Austrian, Hungarian, and Russian World War I soldiers of Polish nationality and began to expand aggressively in three directions at the expense of its neighbors. Thus, the conflicts of the next 20 years were foreshadowed.

Polish self-image

Poland's history spans almost a thousand years, during which the Polish people—having grown from a small Slavic tribe into a kingdom—rose to become a great empire and rulers over many foreign peoples for half of that time. The second half of Polish history is marked by internal disintegration, the conquest of non-Polish-populated areas of Poland by Russians and Ottomans, and finally the "Three Partitions of Poland," the division of the country between Russia, Austria, and Prussia, which ended Poland's independence.

² Kendziora, page 6

³ Halecki, page 223

⁴ Fuchs, pages 76 f

The conflict ended in 1795. It wasn't until 1917 that Austria and Germany formed a new Poland from "their" parts of Poland.

From this thousand-year history, two historical memories dominate the collective memory of Poles and their political consciousness. These are the reminiscences of the "glory" of the old empire, which suggest to Poles that this land is entirely Polish. The second is the memory of the "misery" of the three partitions, which still lives on in the self-image of Poles today as the guilt of the Russians, Austrians, and Germans against their people. This glory and this misery also influenced the self-understanding of the elites and the people in Poland in 1918 and afterward.

According to Polish historiography, the struggle of the small Polish people against their Slavic neighbors marks the beginning of an early kingdom. From the temporary subjugation of these neighboring Slavs, such as the Masurians in East Prussia and the Silesians, the Polish government derived its legal position in 1918 that their lands were originally Polish territories. The advance of German rule and settlement from 963 onward across the Elbe River into the then Slavic-populated areas is still considered in Polish historiography today as Germany's first attack against Poland.⁵

King Bolesław Chrobry briefly extended Poland's rule westward until 1025. Lusatia became Polish from 1018 to 1031, as did Bohemia from 1003 to 1004 and Moravia from 1003 to 1029, along with Silesia and, for a short period, Slovakia. In 1386, the Polish princess Jadwiga married the Lithuanian Grand Duke Jagiello. Their two realms then merged to form the Polish-Lithuanian Personal Union.

Poland contributed a good quarter of this union, while Lithuania, with Belarus, Ukraine, Volhynia, and Podolia, contributed the remaining three-quarters. With this union, Poland's share of power expanded into a vast territory to the east, reaching almost to the foot of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Moscow and before Kursk.⁶ The Lithuanian part will later extend further north to The border of the German Memel Territory and southward to the Black Sea were extended.

However, parts of it in the east and south fell under Russian and Ottoman control even before the First Partition of Poland. In 1569, the personal union of the two states became a real union, and the large Lithuania became part of the much smaller Poland.

The Poles claimed this Greater Lithuania, acquired through marriage, as their inheritance in Versailles in 1918. Thus, the Polish conquests of eastern Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine around 1920 also trace their origins back to this Greater Lithuanian era. According to the Polish understanding, these were territories that Tsarist Russia had given them.

⁵ Halecki, page 19

⁶ Putzgers, page 37



Map 18: The Polish-Lithuanian Union before the First Partition of Poland

in the “three partitions of Poland” that later diminished. Nevertheless, the countries that Poland annexed in the east in 1920 are, historically speaking, more of an “inheritance” of the small Baltic state of Lithuania. Poland’s claims to Belarusian and Ukrainian territories, based on the Polish-Lithuanian Union of 1386, are therefore, given the timeline and the indirect nature of the grounds for the claim, no more convincing to the Soviet Union in 1920 than a Danish claim to Norway and Sweden based on the Kalmar Union of 1387 would have been in 1920.

In 1410, the Teutonic Order was defeated at the Battle of Tannenberg – known to the Poles as the Battle of Grunwald – by a Polish-Lithuanian army, thus ending its reign.

The decline of the Order's power in northeastern Europe was initiated. As a consequence, in 1466 Pomerelia and Warmia came directly under Polish rule, and East Prussia was placed under Polish control as a fief, as overlordship was called at the time. The Polish fiefdom over East Prussia ended in 1657, but Pomerelia and Warmia, with their German and Kashubian populations, remained part of the Kingdom of Poland for over 300 years. They only came under German rule again with the First Partition of Poland in 1772. This explains Poland's claim in 1918 and afterward to the territories that Germany considered German.

In the first partition, Poland also lost Galicia, with a population that was half Polish and half Ukrainian, to Austria.

In the second and third partitions of 1793 and 1795, the heartland of Poland was divided. This remains a painful memory for every Pole. The three partitions are remembered by Poles as the loss of their own country, even though well over half of the partitioned territory was more accurately described as colonies than actual Polish territory. Thus, the second half of Poland's thousand-year history is characterized first by its shrinking to its core territory and only then by the demise of a free Po

Polish-Soviet conflicts

In the east and north, the dispute concerns territories that belonged to the Greater Lithuanian part of the Polish-Lithuanian Dual Monarchy.

In 1918, these territories were located in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. After the end of the First World War, when German forces withdrew from the Baltic states and western Russia, Soviet troops advanced as far north as Lithuania and as far as the Bug River in Ukraine. In response, in the spring of 1919, Poland attacked the Soviet Union, weakened by the revolution, and the now-independent Lithuania. It captured Vilna and pushed the Soviet troops back deep into Belarus and Ukraine.⁷

In December 1919, the founding powers of Poland intervened. The Supreme Allied Council of the victorious powers in Versailles determined the ethnic border between Poland in the west and the Belarusians and Ukrainians in the east as the eastern border of the new Polish state. The border now ran from north to south from Grodno via Brest-Litovsk and then along the Bug River. It was named after the man who had proposed it, the British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon. Following the Council's partition decree, the Soviets demanded the surrender of the parts of Belarus and Ukraine allocated to them on their side of the Curzon Line. Poland refused to relinquish the newly conquered "Eastern Poland." This was followed by a deployment of Soviet troops toward Poland. Poland did the same to the east and invaded Russia without a declaration of war.

⁷ The data and facts for the following account of the Polish-Soviet and Polish-Lithuanian conflicts are taken from the US-American Encyclopedia of Military History by Dupuy and Dupuy, pages 991 ff.



Map 19:1919 Poland's attack against Russia

The fighting raged back and forth for half a year. In May 1920, Polish troops conquered Ukraine as far as Kyiv. In July, the Soviet army gained the upper hand. They managed to push the Polish army back to the gates of Warsaw. In the Battle of Warsaw, the tide turned again; the Poles were victorious and drove the Russians eastward to Minsk in Belarus. The Russian Red Army was virtually annihilated in the process.



Map 20: The CURZON Line

The Soviets had to make peace. On March 18, 1921, in the Treaty of Riga, Russia relinquished its claim to "Eastern Poland," which was part of the Curzon Line. It thus lost 5 million Ukrainians, 1.2 million Belarusians, and approximately 1 million Jews as citizens of its country. Poland, in turn, gained the approximately 1.5 million Poles living in "Eastern Poland." With this newly acquired territory, Poland's new border lay 250 kilometers inside the Russian-speaking world.



Map 21: Soviet attack to the gates of Warsaw

The Treaty of Riga had several consequences that contributed to the later demise of the new Poland. Firstly, the Soviet Union retained a legitimate ground for a later revision at Poland's expense. In 1939, it would recapture precisely the territory up to the Curzon Line that the Allied Supreme Council of the victorious powers had awarded it in 1919. In 1945, it would also expel the two million Poles who were now living there. In their place, 15 million Germans would be deported from their homeland in Silesia, West and East Poland.

Prussia, Danzig, East Brandenburg, the Wartheland, and Pomerania had to give way. Secondly, Poland acquired large minorities that it was unable to integrate in the following years. And thirdly, the victory of relatively small Poland against the enormous Soviet Union led the Polish people to a dangerous overestimation of their own abilities. The Polish people, and with them the army, now believed they could militarily defeat their large neighboring states.

Thus, in 1939 they saw no reason to negotiate instead of waging war.

Furthermore, the war between Poland and the Soviets had consequences for the future relations between the nations of Europe. The postwar powers, represented by the "Supreme Allied Council," accepted without consequence that a militarily powerful state disregarded a border they had drawn. They accepted the attack of a state without a declaration of war. They ignored the right to self-determination of several million people in Eastern Europe. They bowed to the force of the facts created by a country with its military. This did not fail to leave a lasting impression on the people in the defeated countries of the Soviet Union and Germany, who later did the same.

Polish-Lithuanian conflicts

The second country that Poland touches is Lithuania, which has been independent since 1918. Initially, Russia refused to recognize the independence of the new state and occupied the capital, Vilna, and its surrounding area. However, the Poles considered the disputed territory Polish. Vilna had a large Polish population, while the surrounding area was predominantly Lithuanian. When the Soviet Union, preoccupied with other matters in the war with Poland, recognized Lithuania's independence in July 1920 and withdrew its troops. Poland then occupied Vilna and its surrounding area in October 1920. The League of Nations in Geneva protested unsuccessfully and proposed a plebiscite. Poland denied the population in the conquered territory the right to national self-determination and retained control of the eastern part of the fledgling Lithuanian state without allowing a referendum. In 1938, Poland massed troops along the border, threatened war, and forced the Lithuanians to recognize the Polish annexation of 1920 under international law.

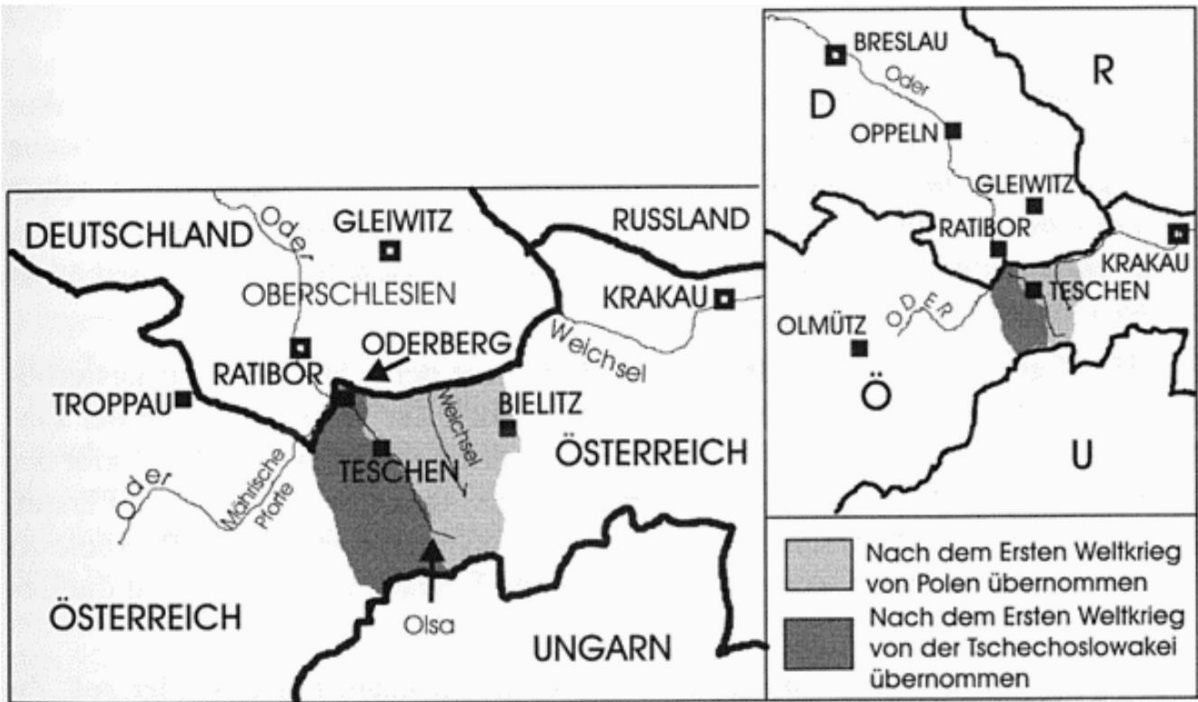
This war of 1920 and the threat of war in 1938 also had an indirect influence on the subsequent relations between states in Europe. Firstly, the League of Nations lost significance as a forum because it ultimately stood by helplessly as a member state broke the peace. Secondly, Poland cited minority rights and historical ties as justification for its wars. In Vilnius and the surrounding area, Poles were a minority, and their rights from the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had been suspended for 125 years.

That's the case, even though the union had existed for 400 years beforehand. Hitler annexed the remaining parts of Germany in 1939 using precisely the same false justification.

Czechoslovakia and Stalin annexed the three Baltic states in 1940. The German people accepted this injustice perpetrated by their own government against Czechoslovakia 18 years later without resistance, not least because such acts of aggression were almost commonplace in Europe after 1918, here in Lithuania and elsewhere, and were tolerated by the victorious powers without serious objection. For the German people in 1939, such injustice was therefore no longer unusual.

Polish-Czech conflicts

The third state from which Poland demanded land was Czechoslovakia. In 1918, both Poland and the Czech Republic laid claim to the Teschen region, a territory roughly 60 by 50 kilometers in size, located south of Upper Silesia.



Map 22: The Teschen region as part of Austria
between the 1918 state borders

The region is sometimes referred to in literature as the Teschen Region, after the city of Teschen, and sometimes as the Olsa Region, after the Olsa River that flows through it. The majority of the population consists of the Slonzaks, a distinct small Slavic people with their own identity, similar to the Sorbs in the German Lusatia region. Otherwise, Germans, Poles, and Czechs live in and around Cieszyn.⁸ The importance of the Cieszyn region stems from three factors. The first lies in the area's wealth of coal mines, steelworks, and a considerable

⁸ Roos, Poland and Europe, page 18

Part of the Czech heavy industry. The second factor arises from the geographical circumstances. On the northern edge of the region, the Oder River, flowing through the Moravian Gate, cuts through a chain of mountains. The state that controls the Gate commands a gateway to its neighboring country. The third factor is related to this. The Moravian Gate is home to the town of Oderberg, one of the most important railway junctions in East-Central Europe.

During the Paris negotiations on the postwar territorial order, Poland, with French support, secured the award of the eastern part of the Teschen region. Following disputes between the Czechs and Poles, the Supreme Allied Council once again divided the small territory between the two adversaries. However, Poland refused to accept this division. It argued that the population in the western part, which remained with the Czechs, was Polish. But, as the Poles failed to mention, this area was also home to 80,000 Poles and 150,000 people of other nationalities.⁹

The second pillar of the Polish justification rests on historical claims as perceived by the Poles. From 1290 to 1653, Piast dukes of Polish origin ruled the small Principality of Teschen, which, however, became part of the Kingdom of Bohemia as early as 1292. Since then, Teschen's connection to Poland has existed only through a distant kinship between the ruling houses of both countries.

The dukes of Teschen belonged to a collateral line of the Polish Piast kings, who had already died out in 1370. In 1625, the Teschen line of the Piasts also died out with its last descendant, Duke Frederick William. In 1653, the Bohemian king granted the vacant fief of Teschen to a Saxon prince.¹⁰ Thus, to illustrate this with a historical parallel, the Teschen region was no more Polish in 1918 than Tuscany is German. So much for the Poles' justification.

In 1938, during the Sudetenland crisis, Poland revived the Teschen question. At that time, the German Reich government demanded that the Czech government in Prague cede the predominantly German-populated Sudetenland to it. Warsaw considered its own demand for West Teschen to be just as justified as the German demand for the Sudetenland. After initially recognizing the Polish claim, England and France ultimately rejected it, fearing the complete disintegration of the multi-ethnic Czechoslovak state as a consequence.

Thus, the British, French, and with them the Soviets, rejected the Polish claim to West Teschen. The Soviet Union even threatened serious consequences. Moscow and Prague concluded a mutual assistance pact in May 1935. The Soviets warned the Poles against attacking Teschen and threatened to denounce the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of July 1932 if they did not comply. The situation was different...

⁹ Burneleit, page 21

¹⁰ Meyer's conversation lexicon in Teschen

Germany's reaction. On September 20, 1938, the Polish ambassador Lipski inquired of Hitler in Berlin whether Germany had any objections to a Polish annexation of the western Teschen region. Hitler and his Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop raised no objections, citing the need to protect the Czechs.

Hitler, however, expresses the hope that in return the German city of Danzig, still under League of Nations mandate, could also be united with the German Reich.¹¹ The book discusses this later.

In the last week of September 1938, Poland deployed an army corps near Teschen and threatened the Czechoslovak government with war. Czechoslovakia, already unable to act effectively at the time, yielded, and Poland occupied the disputed territory from October 1st to 10th.

The gain in land, industry, and people had disastrous consequences for the Poles. First, the Soviet Union promptly denounced the 1932 Soviet-Polish Non-Aggression Pact, which Poland desperately needed a year later.¹² Not even a full year later, on September 17, 1939, the Soviet Union attacked the expanding Poland.

Secondly, talks have now been initiated at the highest level between Berlin and Warsaw regarding the future of the city of Danzig. Since Hitler, after initial reservations and much back and forth, is granting the Poles not only West Teschen but also the predominantly German-populated border town of Oderberg on the edge of Upper Silesia,¹³ his hopes for compensation in Danzig are very justified.

The subsequent intransigence of the Poles on this issue a year later proved to be the last straw, leading to a war in which the Poles suffered terribly. Thirdly, immediately after the annexation of Teschen, Poland began disenfranchising the non-Poles living there in economic and administrative matters. The Sjöyösk, in particular, were accused of being nothing more than renegade Poles. Thus, the Polish state quickly created further minorities who desired the downfall of the country above all else.

Fourthly, Poland has now violated the Kellogg Pact for the second time, in which it committed itself in 1928 with other states to *"renounce war as a means of settling international disputes and never seek to settle disputes except by peaceful means."*

The deployment of the army corps in September 1938 and the ultimatum to the Czechs are clear violations of this agreement to "outlaw war".

Poland can therefore no longer hope to be protected by the Kellogg Pact a year later. And fifthly, apart from Latvia and Romania, Poland now has no neighbor that it has not attacked at least once since 1918.

¹¹ Rassinier, page 230

¹² Taylor, page 234

¹³ Roos, Poland and Europe, page 355

The relatively small Teschen affair, which no school history book considers worthy of mention, thus becomes an accelerant for the Danzig question and the Second World War.

Polish-German conflicts

The fourth country with which Poland cannot find peace is the German Reich to the west. From their respective perspectives, both states have far-reaching demands on each other regarding territory and people. In 1920, following the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was forced to cede West Prussia, Posen, and Upper Silesia, along with two million German citizens, to the newly formed Poland.



Map 23: Poland's territorial gains

In February 1919, at the Versailles Conference of victors, the Polish delegation also demanded the annexation of all of Upper Silesia, East Pomerania, all of West Prussia (including the purely German-speaking districts), Warmia and Masuria, and the Memel Territory. Poland was thus demanding more than it had lost in the three partitions since 1772.¹⁴ These latter demands, however, failed due to the objections of the victorious powers, Great Britain and Italy. British Prime Minister Lloyd George assessed Poland's demands with foresight when he stated on March 25,

1919: *"The proposal of the Polish government to place over 2 million Germans under Polish administration through a new border demarcation in the west must, in my estimation, sooner or later lead to a new war in Eastern Europe."* The ¹⁵

German public perceived the forced territorial cessions to Poland as varying in severity, depending on the region. Depending on history and the language affiliation of the majority of the inhabitants, the lost territories are sometimes considered Polish, sometimes German, and sometimes even as purely German.

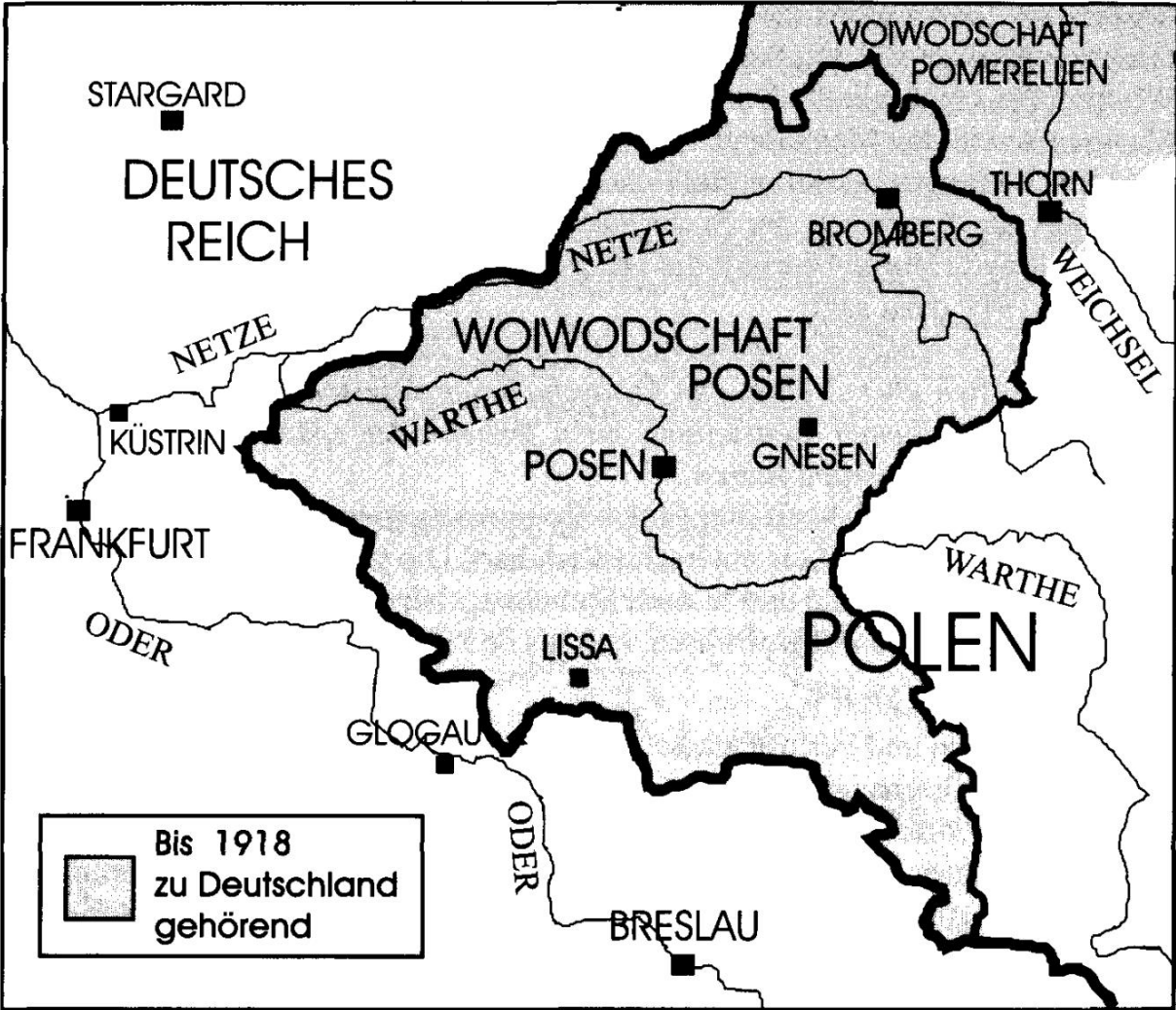
The cessions and losses continued from 1918 to 1922. When the war ended for Austria-Hungary and the German Empire at the end of 1918, a Regency Council in Warsaw proclaimed the independence of the new state of Poland on October 7, 1918. On December 13, the Polish government broke off relations with the German Empire, and Poland henceforth considered itself a victorious power.¹⁶ Later that same month, Poles in the provinces of Posen, West Prussia, and Upper Silesia, which had previously belonged to the German Empire, rose up and attempted to annex these territories to Poland by force.

The **province of Posen** was Polish until 1793 and was only annexed by Prussia during the Second Partition of Poland. Since then, with a brief interruption during the Napoleonic era, it has been under German rule. The major cities of Posen and Gniezno are old Polish settlements, one a former ducal residence, the other a bishopric. However, as early as the mid-13th century, Polish dukes settled German colonists in the Posen area. Thus, the present-day city center of Posen was founded by German settlers. In 1253, German colonists established a town on the left bank of the Warta River, next to an old Polish settlement on the right bank, which remained a purely German community until the Counter-Reformation. As late as 1918, 43% of the citizens of Posen were German, and 57% were Polish. Otherwise, before the First World War, the province of Posen was predominantly inhabited by Poles, with only 35% of the province's population being G

¹⁴ Piekalkiewicz, page 36 and Halecki, page 224

¹⁵ Piekalkiewicz, page 36

¹⁶ Halecki, page 223

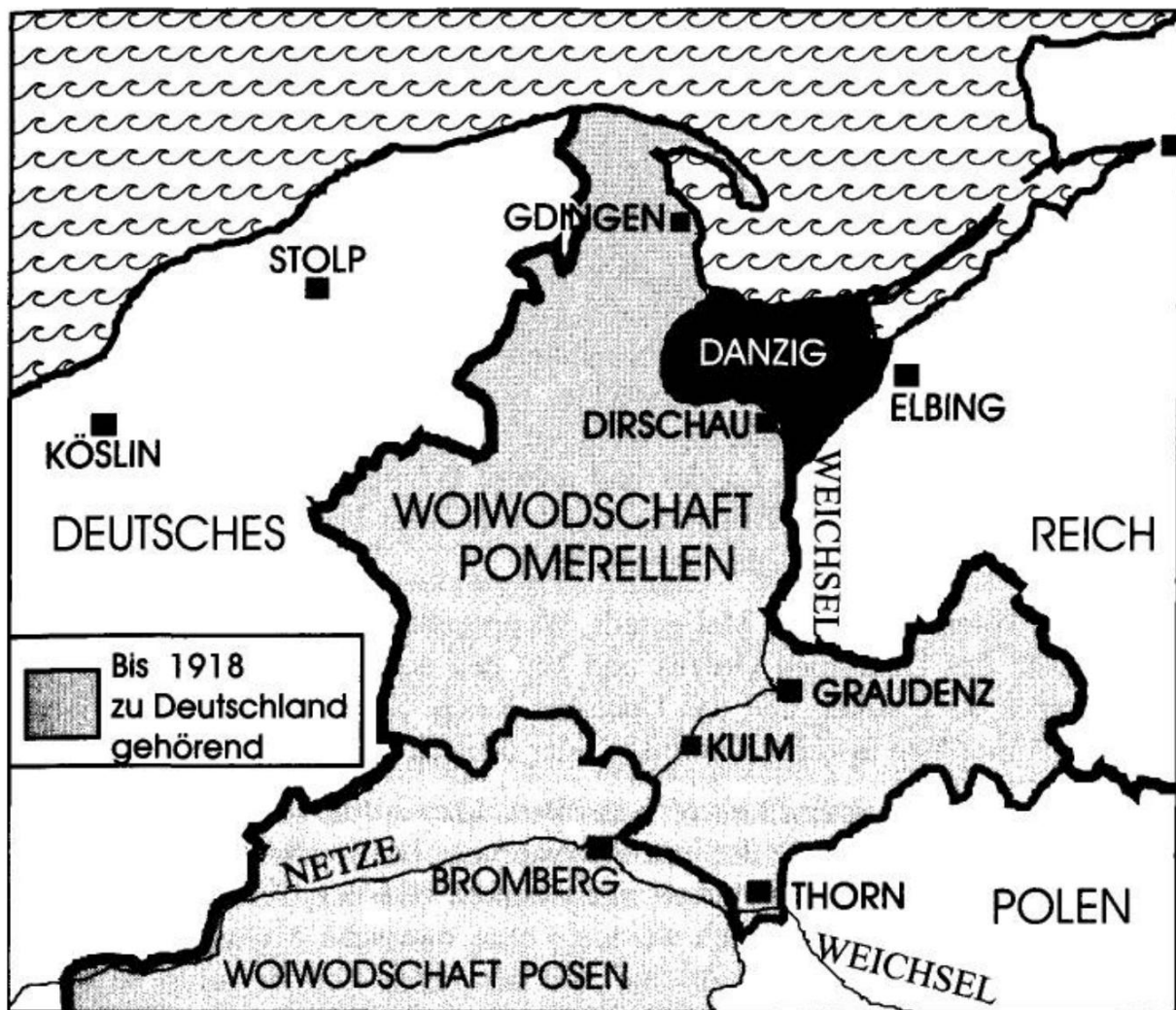


Map 24: The former province of Posen

The German Reich therefore soon accepted the annexation of the province of Posen to the new Poland. Thoughts of revenge, such as those surrounding Alsace-Lorraine in France, did not arise after the war due to Germany's loss of the province of Posen.

In the **province of West Prussia**, the situation is not so simple. The land, which the Poles call Pomerelia, has frequently switched between Polish and German rule throughout its history.

When Poland first set out to conquer Pomerelia in 965, the Pomeranians, a distinct West Slavic people with their own language, lived there. Thus, the people who originally inhabited the region were neither German nor Polish. The first Polish rule was short-lived. In 1119, Poland succeeded in subjugating Pomerelia and the Pomeranians once again; this time for almost two hundred years. During this time, Poland itself was sometimes under German overlordship and sometimes independent. At the end of the 12th century, 350



Map 25: The parts of the province of West Prussia that became Polish from 1919 onwards, now Pomeranian Voivodeship

Furthermore, there was the immigration of German settlers to Pomerelia. During the first two centuries of Polish rule, Pomerelia was not at peace.

Poland already broke apart into separate duchies in 1202.

During conflicts between Polish dukes and to defend against raids by the neighboring Prussian people, the Poles repeatedly called upon the German emperor, German princes, and finally the Teutonic Knights for assistance. In 1226, Duke Konrad of Masovia of Poland granted the territory between Kulm and Thorn to the Teutonic Knights as a gift in exchange for its reconquest from the Prussians. From 1270 onward, two Polish dukes fought each other over Pomerelia and its capital, Danzig. They called upon the German Brandenburgians and the Teutonic Knights for military support. At the end of this conflict, the victorious Polish duke was unable to compensate the Order for its support, and so Pomerelia fell to Poland in 1309.

in the possession of the Teutonic Order. In 1343, King Casimir III of Poland officially relinquished Pomerelia, which in German usage was now called West Prussia. Pomerelia-West Prussia henceforth formed the land bridge between Pomerania and East Prussia for the Holy Roman Empire. In 1410, after the Battle of Tannenberg, the Teutonic Knights once again recognized Polish overlordship. After another war, the territory reverted entirely to Poland in 1466.

However, West Prussia-Pomerelia did not initially become an integral part of the Polish state in the modern sense. In the Second Peace of Thorn of 1466, it merely recognized the Polish king's overlordship and retained a number of its own sovereign rights. Thus, the inhabitants of West Prussia retained the German language, the right to levy their own taxes, exemption from military service outside the country, and other privileges until Poland abolished these rights in 1569, in violation of the Second Peace of Thorn.

Pomerelia will thus be "brought into line" with Poland.

Poland was partitioned for the first time in 1772. West Prussia, as a former possession of the Teutonic Order and part of the German Reich territory before 1466, reverted to Prussia and the Holy Roman Empire. Therefore, the question of whether West Prussia-Pomerelia is historically Polish or German is entirely irrelevant.

By 1918, depending on the statistics, 73 to 65% of the inhabitants had German as their mother tongue, representing well over two-thirds of the population. The Kashubians living in northern Pomerelia-West Prussia, comprising another 6% of the total population, were also not Polish, even though they spoke a Slavic mother tongue.¹⁷ Despite their linguistic affinity with the Poles, they themselves were no more Polish than the Dutch were German. Thus, at the end of the war in 1918, only a quarter of the inhabitants of West Prussia-Pomerelia were Polish. Nevertheless, the Polish delegation at the victors' Supreme Allied Council in Paris claimed the territory for themselves. They pointed to the "strong" Polish population and their historical rights, which they believed they possessed. They also referred to the promise made by the USA to provide postwar Poland with a land connection to the sea. The Germans' counter-demand for a plebiscite in the province of West Prussia was rejected by the victors. Germany had to cede West Prussia, with the exception of small border areas with purely German populations, by the 10th.

Handed over to Poland in January 1920.

This regulation violates the right of peoples to self-determination, which the victorious powers had established as a principle of the post-war territorial order.

The forced cession of West Prussia to the new Poland was perceived in Germany as an arbitrary act by the victors. On the one hand, the forced transfer of the German population to Poland was painful. On the other hand, East Prussia was also separated for the first time in 150 years. East Prussia thus lost its direct economic connection to the German Reich and therefore its main source of income.

¹⁷ The 1910 census shows 60% Germans, 32% Poles and 7% Kashubians.

The sales area for agricultural products. For example, sales of cattle into the Reich fell from 70,000 head in 1913 to a mere 1,700 in 1927.¹⁸ The figures for other agricultural goods are similar.

The loss of the land bridge between Northeast Pomerania and East Prussia is one of the unintended consequences of the Treaty of Versailles. From 1920 onward, the Pomerelian

Voivodeship became a burden and a point of contention in German-Polish relations. According to the victorious powers, Poland was to become a naval power in the Baltic Sea and participate in long-distance maritime trade with its own merchant fleet. In this way, England and France created competition for Germany and Russia. The British and French now also had a legal justification for deploying naval forces in the Baltic to protect Poland. Furthermore, the separation of East Prussia from the Reich meant that German land, sea, and air transport links to the region were subject to Polish control and harassment.

In 1938 and 1939, the dispute between the Reich and Poland over the northern part of Pomerelia-West Prussia intensified, coinciding with the conflict over Danzig. In 1938, the German Reich initially demanded only secure, extraterritorial transport routes through northern Pomerelia, through the so-called Polish Corridor. When Poland refused this, Germany demanded a plebiscite in the disputed territory. It is noteworthy that Germany never once demanded that Poland return all of West Prussia before the outbreak of war.

The **city of Danzig**, the capital of the former province of West Prussia, is part of the province. Its history is closely intertwined with that of West Prussia, but in 1920 it moved separately into the spotlight of world history. On November 15, 1920, following a decision by the victorious powers, the Hanseatic city was separated from the German Reich without a plebiscite and placed "under the protection of the League of Nations." The citizens of Danzig lost their German citizenship and became citizens of a newly formed "Free State of Danzig." At that time, 340,000 people lived in the city and its surrounding area. 97% of the population was German, and 3% belonged to other nations, mostly Poles. In the years between the two wars, the population repeatedly demanded a plebiscite on their continued affiliation with the German Reich. The League of Nations rejected all such requests.¹⁹

Poland, too, is dissatisfied with Danzig's status as a Free City under League of Nations rule. During the victors' conference at Versailles, the Polish delegation demanded that Danzig be annexed to the new Poland. The justification for this demand is again largely derived from the city's earlier affiliation with Poland.

¹⁸ Grimm, page 87

¹⁹ Burckhardt, page 26

The area where present-day Gdańsk is located was initially inhabited by Burgundians, Goths, and Prussians before developing, after the Migration Period, into the main settlement of the Pomeranians, who settled in what would later become West Prussia-Pomerelia in the 6th century. Thus, Gdańsk is originally neither German nor Polish.

In 1119, a Polish king conquered the city of Danzig for the first time, along with the rest of Pomerelia. Towards the end of the century, German immigration to Danzig began, and in 1224, Lübeck merchants founded their own trading settlement within the city. After the disintegration of Poland in 1202 and as a result of the aforementioned conflicts between two Polish dukes vying for control of Pomerelia, Danzig, along with all of Pomerelia, came under the control of the Teutonic Knights in 1309. This marked the end of the first two centuries of Polish rule over Danzig as a city of Pomeranians, Poles, and Germans. In 1343, King Casimir III of Poland officially relinquished Danzig forever.

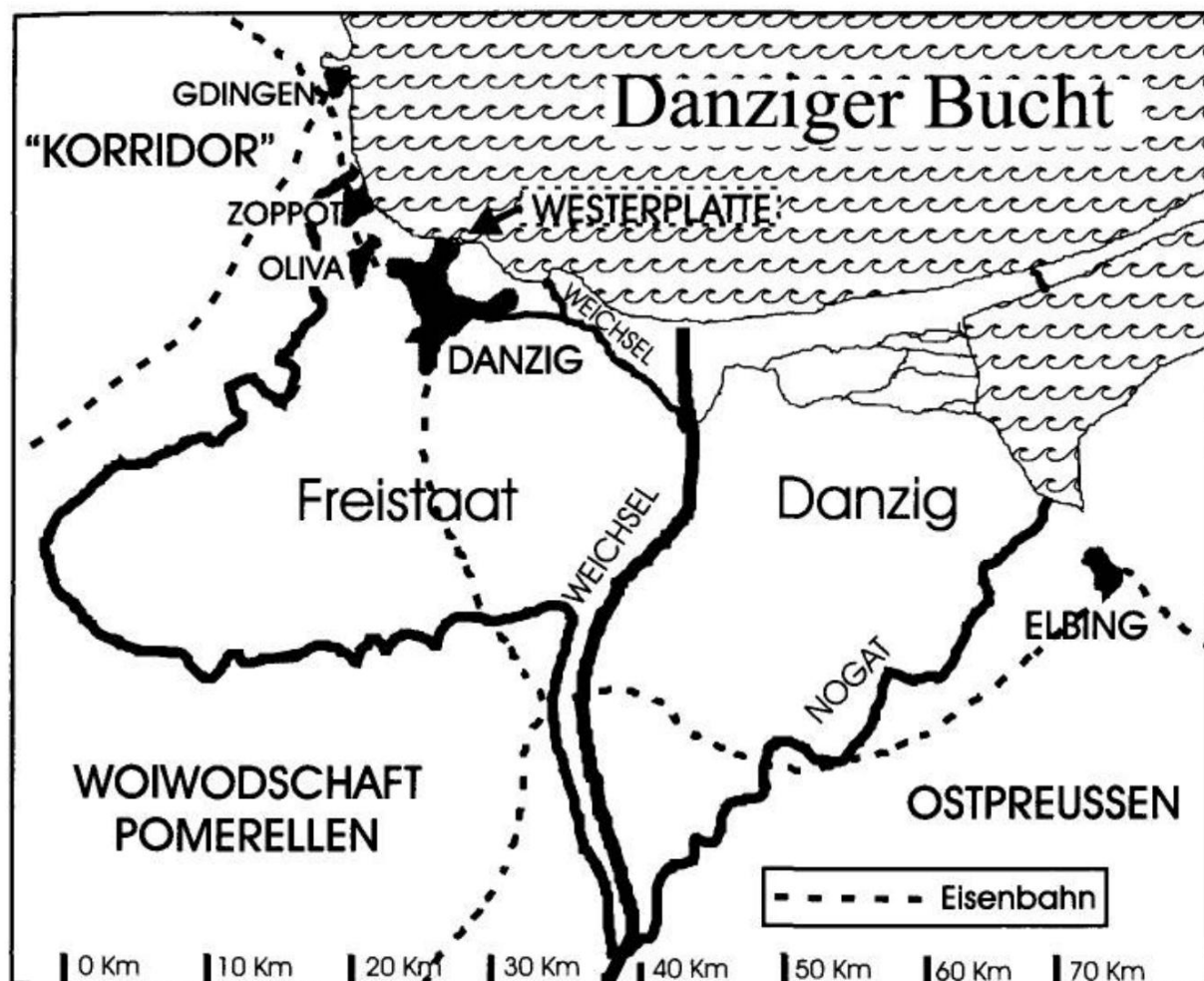
For the next century and a half, the inhabitants of Danzig adopted German law and the German language along with the German immigrants. The city now belonged to the Teutonic Order's territory and thus also to the German Empire. However, this period within the Empire came to an end with the decline of the Teutonic Order. In 1454, the now German citizens of Danzig chose King Casimir IV of Poland as their new protector. For the next 130 years or so, Danzig became a largely sovereign city-state within the Kingdom of Poland, with its own language, currency, troops, warships, and fortifications, and the right to decide on matters of war and peace. Polish kings were not even permitted to enter Danzig with their own troops. Each new Polish king had to reaffirm the city's independence and rights. In 1573, the Danzig city council attempted to rejoin Germany, but Poland forced the city to remain part of Poland. In doing so, Danzig also lost its special status within the Kingdom of Poland. After not quite three and a half centuries, in 1793, the city-state of Danzig, which had remained German internally, was annexed by Prussia during the Second Partition of Poland. From then until 1920, it belonged to the German Empire for the second time.

Given such a turbulent history, the views of Poles and Germans regarding Danzig's affiliation naturally differ. For Poland, the year 1920 is defined by the two periods during which it held sovereignty over Danzig. Here, the Polish perspective is the same as for all other cities with German, Russian, or Lithuanian populations that were once part of Poland. For Germany, the crucial point is that Danzig's...

²⁰ Kendziora, page 17

The population has always been and remained German during the last six centuries.

Article 102 of the Treaty of Versailles separates the Hanseatic city of Danzig from the German Reich, without, however, annexing it to the new Poland.



Map 26: The Free State of Danzig

Article 104 stipulates that Danzig shall henceforth be a "Free" City with its own autonomous administration under the direction of a High Commissioner appointed by the League of Nations. According to the treaty, the Polish government shall be responsible for Danzig's foreign affairs. Thus, for the next 19 years, Danzig's interests abroad will be represented from Warsaw, and no longer from Berlin. Furthermore, according to Article 104 of the treaty, Danzig will belong to Poland's customs territory from 1920 onward. The Danzig waterways and the entire port will be available for Polish use without restriction. Poland will oversee rail and waterway traffic in and around Danzig. Postal and telecommunications connections from Poland to the port –

However, only these – will be transferred to Polish authorities.

Influence over the Free State is thus clearly limited. However, in the 19 years leading up to 1939, the Polish state attempts to gradually annex the Free State in a series of small steps.

The separation of the city from German territory was intended to provide the new Poland with the seaport promised by US President Wilson. However, this reason for Danzig's special status ceased to exist in 1928. In that year, the Poles opened their newly built port of Gdynia, thus gaining direct access to the sea. Nevertheless, the victorious Allied powers did not return Danzig to the German Reich.

Poland extends its postal network to the entire Free State, even though the Polish postal service, according to the Treaty of Versailles, is intended solely for the port. It refuses to accept the League of Nations currency, the Danzig gulden, as legal tender within Danzig territory, even though it is pegged to the British pound and therefore not worthless. Against the express protest of the Danzig Senate, the Polish military establishes an ammunition depot in the port. Later, Poland attempts to reinforce its troops in the port, ostensibly to protect the depot. However, this reinforcement of Polish forces in the port of Danzig is thwarted by the League of Nations. In 1932, Poland takes advantage of a British naval visit to Danzig to relocate its own warships there. When the Senate of the Free City protested, Poland informed them that "Polish warships will shell the nearest public building if the population of Danzig insults the Polish flag on the Polish ships."²¹ From August 1932 onward, Poland generally claimed the right to keep its fleet in the port of Danzig. Thus, the Polish state's influence over the Free City expanded slowly but steadily.

The status of the Free City of Danzig, with its German population lacking German citizenship, operating under a League of Nations mandate, and increasingly integrated into the Polish state, led to persistent resentment among the population of the German Reich. A "Free State of Liverpool" under German rule at the same time would have had no different effect on the people of Great Britain. The Germans in the separated Danzig reacted negatively to the growing demands of the Poles and longed to rejoin their own country. Thus, a particularly strong sense of national identity developed in Danzig.

One crucial aspect of the limbo created by the British and French with the status of a "Free" small Republic of Danzig under the suzerainty of the League of Nations, with a German population and Polish customs, diplomatic, and trade rights, should not be overlooked. This constructed special status not only creates foreseeable conflict and explosive potential between

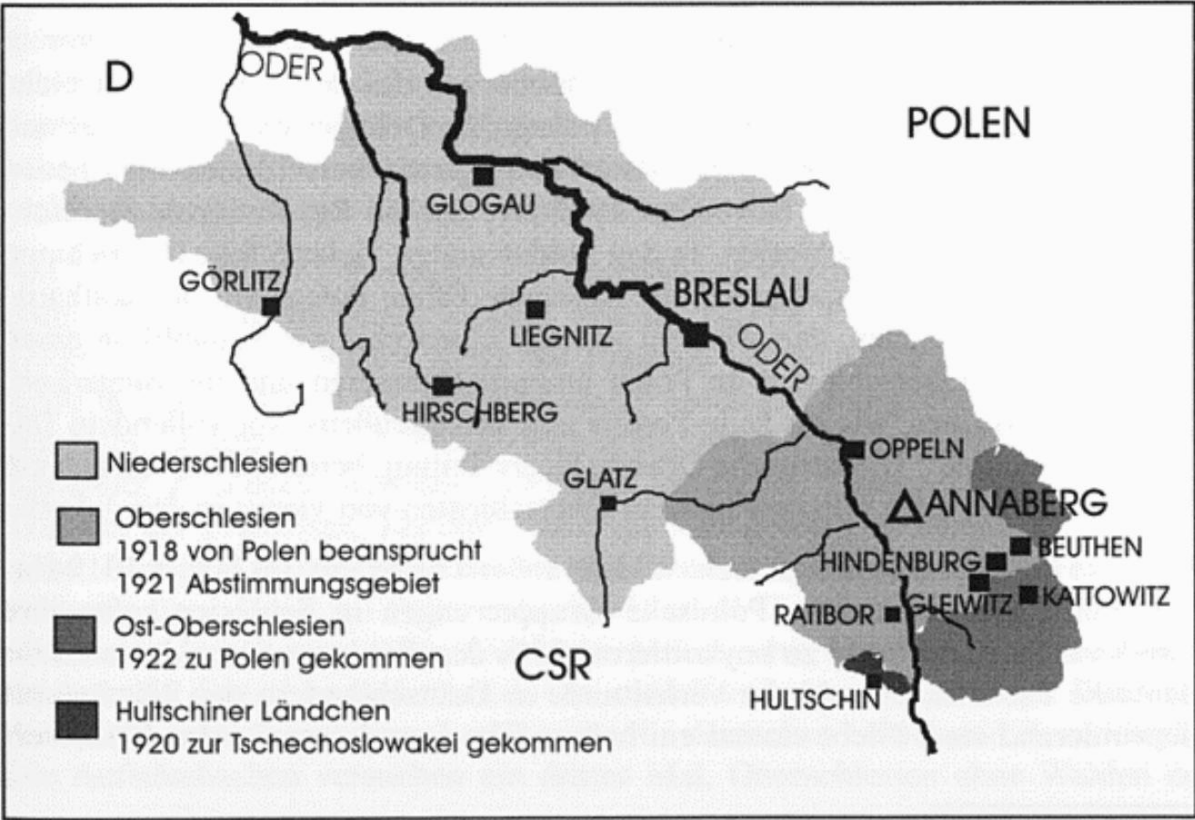
²¹ Roos, Poland and Europe, page 47

Poland and the German Reich. It also grants the two guarantor powers of Versailles, England and France, a "guardianship" for Danzig and thus a say in all future German-Polish disputes and a military-political foothold in the Baltic Sea.

Despite the interests of the British and French, and despite the Polish efforts to permanently integrate Danzig into their state, Hitler harbored illusions until the summer of 1939. Since Danzig was not, under international law, part of Poland, he believed he could find a way to reach an agreement with Poland if the opportunity arose and Poland showed some other concessions. Hitler saw his concession, aside from the Teschen concession, in his own final renunciation of the people and territories that Germany had lost in Posen, West Prussia, and Upper Silesia. He considered the Poles' relinquishment of some of their rights in the Free City of Danzig acceptable. But Danzig had become a symbol for both countries, Germany and Poland.

The fourth territorial loss to Poland lies in **Upper Silesia**. Poland is demanding all of Upper Silesia from the victors' Supreme Allied Council. This claim is also based on historical grounds and the strength of the Polish population.

Silesia's history under Polish rule, however, is only an early and rather short interlude. Around the year 990, Silesia first came under Polish rule.



Map 27: Silesia

Conquest of Poland, which at that time was under German suzerainty. In 1163, during a Polish succession dispute, the German Emperor Frederick I intervened. Barbarossa intervened, instigating the founding of two Silesian duchies and the appointment of Polish Piast princes as regents. The Piast dukes invited German craftsmen and farmers to their sparsely populated lands to cultivate Silesia. Silesia thus gradually became German. In 1202, Poland fragmented into its duchies for over a century, and Silesia ceased to be part of a unified Polish state. Over time, the two duchies were divided through inheritance into numerous smaller Piast principalities. In 1327, all Piast princes in Upper Silesia recognized King John of Bohemia from the German House of Luxembourg as their overlord. Bohemia itself was part of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1335, King Casimir the Great of Poland formally and by treaty relinquished his sovereignty over Silesia and Poland's claim to it in perpetuity. With this, at the latest, the Polish history of Silesia came to an end. Thus, with the re-establishment of the state of Poland after the First World War, there was no Polish claim to Silesia for six centuries and no political connection between Silesia and Poland for seven centuries.

At the end of the First World War, the population of Upper Silesia was overwhelmingly German. It was only in the second half of the 19th century, when eastern Upper Silesia developed into an industrial region and the border area offered attractive jobs for people from nearby Russian Poland and Habsburg Galicia, that large numbers of Polish industrial and agricultural workers immigrated to Silesia. With the collapse of the German Empire and the end of the war in 1918, the Polish delegates in Versailles and the descendants of the Polish guest workers attempted to annex all of Upper Silesia to the new Poland.²² In November 1918, the revolution in Germany also reached the province of Silesia. In the soldiers' councils of many cities, Poles took command and raised the red-and-white Polish flag on the roofs of the town halls. They are attempting to reinterpret the transition from monarchy to republic as an annexation of Upper Silesia to Poland and to present the victors' conference in Versailles, as in the case of Posen and West Prussia, with a *fait accompli*.²³ The German Supreme Army Command is preparing

The attempt came to an end. It is the first of four Polish uprisings in Upper Silesia in three years.

What follows is extremely turbulent, right up to the end. In January 1919, Reichstag elections are held. Polish groups in Silesia call on their compatriots to boycott the election. Nevertheless, 75% of voters cast their ballots for German parties, even though conditions in Germany at the time are extremely depressing. Not even half a year later, on May 7, 1919,

²² Benoist-Méchin, Volume 2, pages 157 ff.

²³ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 2, page 161

The victors' Supreme Allied Council proposed the transfer of all of Upper Silesia to Poland. Following the January elections, this was a clear violation of the Silesian population's right to self-determination. The German delegation in Versailles therefore demanded a plebiscite in Upper Silesia. After the loss of the Saar region and the German part of Lorraine to France, this would have been the third industrial region that the victors sought to seize from Germany. Moreover, the Upper Silesian coal and industrial region had been developed exclusively by German engineers and with German capital.

On June 16, 1919, the Supreme Allied Council, against France's opposition, granted Germany the right to hold a plebiscite. The elections were to be conducted by an inter-Allied commission and protected by Allied troops. Germany was required to withdraw its troops stationed in the plebiscite area beforehand. After the German withdrawal and before the arrival of the Allied soldiers, a second Polish uprising broke out to preempt the plebiscite and the arrival of the foreign military. On July 10, 1919, insurgents—as the Germans called them, or patriots, as the Poles saw them—blew up three railway and road bridges to seal off the disputed territory from Germany. Although German customs officials still managed to intercept arms shipments and propaganda material from Poland, Polish miners throughout the Silesian mining region went on strike on July 16. Then an uprising of almost 22,000 armed fighters, organized in Polish associations, breaks out.²⁴ The former Reichstag deputy Korfanty, who until then had represented the Silesian Poles in Berlin, leads the uprising. Since the Reichswehr had been withdrawn at the behest of the victorious powers, German Freikorps intervene. They advance into Upper Silesia against the protests of the victors and end the second revolt within a week.

On February 11, 1920, the Inter-Allied Control Commission assumed political power in Upper Silesia. With it, 11,500 French and 2,000 Italian soldiers, under the command of French General Le Rond, entered Upper Silesia. Le Rond made no secret of his sympathy for Poland. He took sides instead of mediating. On August 17, 1920, clashes broke out in Katowice between German demonstrators and French troops. Korfanty seized the opportunity for a third uprising. Bloody clashes and looting spread throughout Upper Silesia. The Polish state marched on the border with 11 divisions and exerted external pressure. Polish militias, reinforced by Polish troops, pushed back the German security forces and—with the tacit approval of the French—removed German teachers and civil servants from several districts.

The insurgents are attempting for a third time to seize control of Upper Silesia without elections.

²⁴ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 2, page 168

The uprising is ended this time through negotiations. The Supreme Allied Council now takes action. In March 1921, it deploys another 2,000 soldiers, this time from England, to Upper Silesia to ensure undisturbed elections.

On March 21, 1921, the plebiscite demanded by Germany took place. The day was preceded by further bloody clashes. During campaign events and the voting process, 1,520 German citizens lost their lives. The election result led to the partition of Upper Silesia. Almost 61% of the population voted to remain with the German Reich, while 39% favored joining the new Poland. Regrettably, the result did not reveal a clear ethnic divide. The majority of residents in 13 cities in the industrial region wanted to remain with Germany, but the rural inhabitants in the electoral districts where these cities were located overwhelmingly preferred Poland. Although the overall majority would have been sufficient for Germany, and although some of the cities had access to the adjacent German majority territory, the Inter-Allied Control Commission assigned them to Poland. However, the commission initially disagreed on the border line to divide the majority territories. The British and Italians proposed a dividing line that would have left 350,000 Poles with the German Reich. However, the French prevailed with a border that would make 400,000 Germans Polish citizens.²⁵

Germans and Poles regret the decision. Germany mourns the loss of 400,000 citizens and its Silesian mining region. 85% of Upper Silesia's coal reserves now belong to Poland. Poland, however, had clearly expected more.

Around the time of the elections, France supplied weapons for Poland's war with Russia. Some of the weapons were diverted to Silesia in Poland.²⁶ On 1. In May 1921, the Inter-Allied Commission announced the course of the new border. The Poles were not prepared to accept the plebiscite result and the partition of Upper Silesia. On May 2, the Polish population went on strike in Silesia's coal mines, factories, and agricultural sectors. On May 3, Korfanty called for the fourth uprising. Trains carrying artillery pieces, mortars, small arms, and supplies rolled from Poland into Upper Silesia, which was still considered German under international law. Poland's regular army supported the uprising with a few battalions of infantry. General Le Rond's French soldiers allowed the Polish truck and infantry columns to pass unmolested. The Italians did their duty and confronted the insurgents and the Polish forces, paying for it with 40 dead and 200 wounded.²⁷ Two Korfanty documents from May 3 have survived. The appeal to the population:

²⁵ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 2, page 172

²⁶ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 2, page 173

²⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 2, page 176

"Fellow citizens!"

...For 20 years I have fought tirelessly for your rights and independence. Striking and fighting workers! From now on, I am your brother among you, and I place myself—in agreement with our Polish parties—at the head of our movement. ...To organize a mass movement, I appoint Nowina Doliva as Commander-in-Chief of all armed forces. All district commanders, the leaders, and the insurgents themselves owe him absolute obedience. ...

*At the headquarters in Beuthen on
May 3, 1921, the birthday of the Polish
Constitution.
Korfanty"* ²⁸

The other document is a letter to the governments of the victorious Allied powers, dated the same day: *I solemnly declare that I*

... have done everything in my power to prevent an armed uprising and a disturbance of public order. However, when the proposals of the High Inter-Allied Commission concerning the partition of Upper Silesia became known to the Polish workers and peasants, who for centuries have been the subject of unscrupulous exploitation and brutal oppression by Prussia and Germany, the masses were seized by boundless despair at the thought that they might once again return to Prussian rule. ... 24 hours after the arrival of this dire news... the population spontaneously took up arms. ... To prevent this passionate outburst of the embittered armed people from degenerating into anarchy under the influence of criminal elements, I, at the request of the insurgents and strikers, placed myself at the head of the movement in order to... restore public order as quickly as possible. ...

Korfanty" ²⁹

France blames the uprising on the German press. British Prime Minister Lloyd George, however, offered a completely different assessment of the uprising in the House of Commons on May 13, 1921: *"The Allies, by a general*

decision, determined that the parts of Upper Silesia that voted predominantly for Poland should be given to Poland. Now the Poles have staged an uprising and presented the Allies with a fait accompli . This step was a complete breach of the Treaty of Versailles. ... Poland is the last country that should attempt to violate the Treaty of Versailles."

²⁸ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 2, page 175

²⁹ Hobby, page 178

³⁰ Favors accomplished

violated. ... If Poland were to be given permission to overrun these German provinces, it would end badly....." ³¹

Polish insurgents and troops conquered eastern Upper Silesia, extending to the upper reaches of the Oder River, by May 5th—a territory a quarter larger than the Saar region—within just two days. The German government protested to the governments of the victorious powers on May 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 7th. France attempted to protect the Polish conquest and threatened that it would consider the deployment of the Reichswehr in Upper Silesia a violation of the Treaty of Versailles and would punish it with the occupation of the Ruhr. In France, as a sign that the threat was not empty, the conscripts of 1919, who had already been discharged, were recalled. From May 9th, 1921, the Poles attempted to attack further westward. However, volunteers from all over Germany and Austria gathered, formed Freikorps, and began on May 21st to reconquer the lost and partially destroyed territory. From May 21st to 25th, Poles and Freikorps fought a decisive battle at Annaberg near the small town of Krappnitz. Most of the Polish conquests were recaptured for Germany.

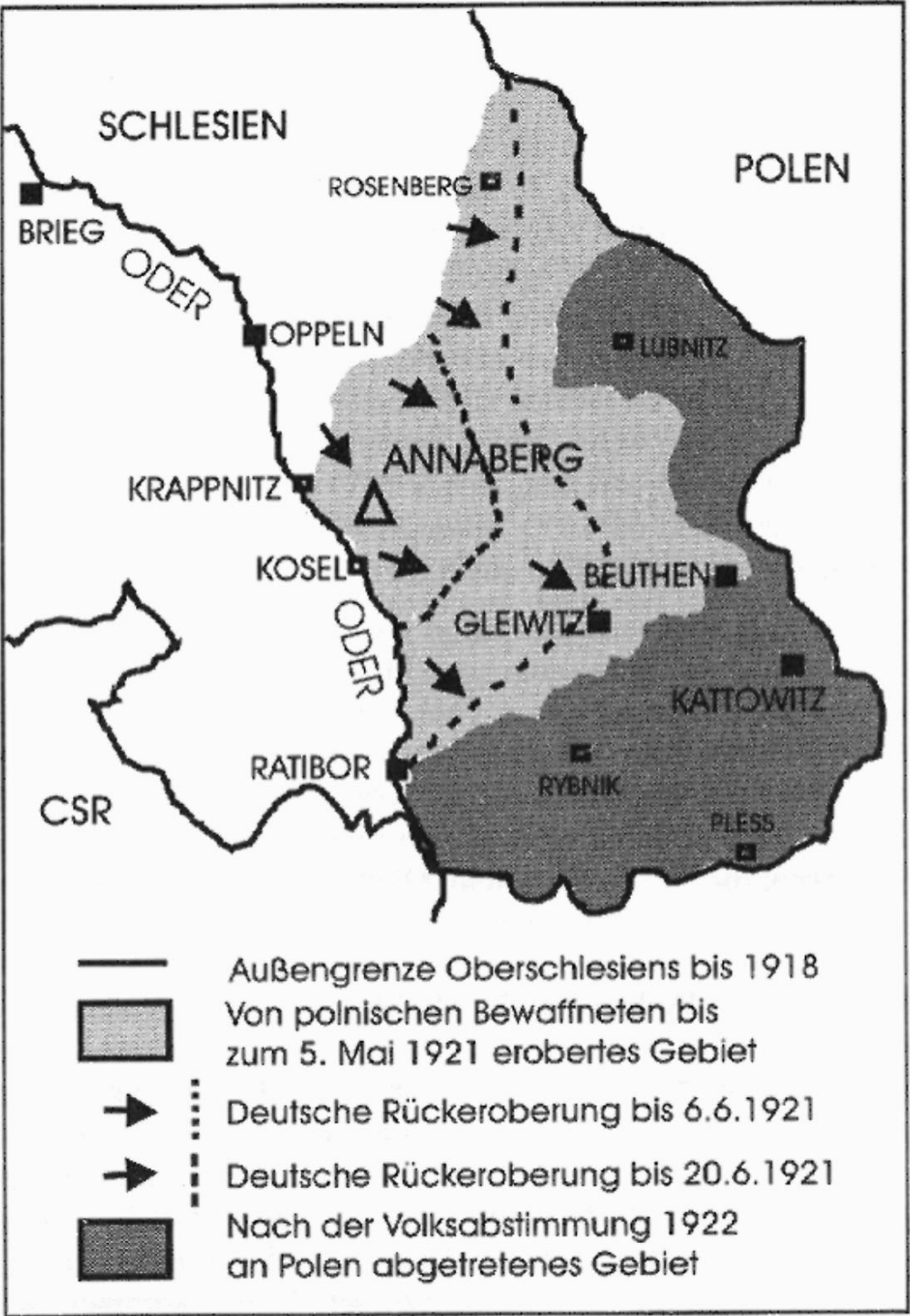
The behavior of the Reich government in Berlin was particularly bitter for the volunteers from all over Germany. Even as the battle was raging, on May 24, under massive pressure from Paris, it issued a decree announcing that every German Freikorps soldier participating in the fighting in Upper Silesia would be punished with imprisonment or a fine of up to 100,000 marks.³² Thus, the Polish-German conflict in Silesia contributed significantly to the lasting destruction of the World War I soldiers' trust in their own government and the new German Republic.

On July 5th, the Freikorps liberated most of Upper Silesia. The division then proceeded according to a proposal by the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Sforza, with a new dividing line – the Sforza Line – so that the German and Polish minorities in their respective foreign countries would be roughly equal in number. On June 17, 1922, East Upper Silesia seceded from the German Reich. The Polish historian Halecki assessed the outcome of this conflict as follows:

"France alone favored Polish claims, while England and Italy were only willing to grant Poland two agricultural districts. Finally, the question was resolved in a manner most compatible with international justice. ... In this way, Poland also gained a considerable portion of the rich industrial regions. ... The new Polish province of Silesia was the only one that-

³¹ Hobby, page 180

³² Reichsgesetzblatt 1921, page 711



Map 28: The Battles for Annaberg

a relatively small part of the restored republic that crossed the borders of the time before the (Polish) partitions.”³³

In Germany, the cession of the industrial area and the predominantly German cities beyond the Sforza Line is perceived as a painful loss. This will remain a barrier between Germany and the new Poland until Adolf Hitler

³³ Halecki, page 229

The German demands were reduced to Danzig and the transit routes. Hitler did not include any of his demands in Upper Silesia. However, the Franco-Polish cooperation during the partition and the Polish uprisings shaped the security policy thinking of the German Reich governments and the young Reichswehr for the next 20 years. From then on, every tension and conflict with France was simultaneously perceived as a Polish threat; conversely, every confrontation with Poland was seen as a threat from the French. The Reichswehr and the population subsequently developed the understanding that military weakness meant the state was vulnerable to blackmail. France's threat to occupy the Ruhr region in the west if the Reich resisted foreign annexations in the east remained unforgettable until the Second World War. The secret armament preparations before 1933 and the rapid reconstruction of the German armed forces from 1935 onwards were legitimized in the eyes of the population and the soldiers by this experience of the early 1920s.

Poland returned to the stage of European history as an independent nation in 1919. However, it did not seek its new identity within the borders imposed by the victors of the First World War. The modern Poles of 1919 dreamed of the old Poland-Lithuania of 1450. They began their latest history with a series of self-inflicted wars. This not only earned them the enmity of all their neighbors but also devalued a number of treaties that might have protected them in 1939.

Poland as a multi-ethnic state

The new Poland, with the annexation of formerly Ukrainian, Belarusian, Lithuanian, Czech, and German territories, became a multi-ethnic state. In 1923, the country's population consisted of 30 million Polish citizens, of whom 19 million—two-thirds—spoke Polish as their mother tongue. Five million were Ukrainians, 2.5 million Jews, 2 million Germans, and 1.2 million Belarusians.³⁴ In addition, there were other minorities of Lithuanian, Czech, or Hungarian origin, as well as Kashubians and Slonzaks. In conquered "Eastern Poland," Poles themselves were a minority.

There are 7.4 million Ukrainians, Jews, and Belarusians living there, but only 1.5 million Poles, which is just under one-sixth of all the people living there.³⁵

Poland was initially required to recognize and guarantee the rights of its minorities in the Minority Protection Treaty attached to the Treaty of Versailles.³⁶ However, Poles perceive this protection treaty as discriminatory because

³⁴ Castellan, pages 151 ff; the figures are taken from the contradictory Polish statistics in the Derived from the cited source:

³⁵ Info BpB, Issue 142, page

³⁶ 25, Minority Protection Treaty of June 28, 1919, so-called Minority Treaty

it binds them and not also their neighboring countries. Poland also accedes to the "Geneva Convention for the Protection of National Minorities" on May 15, 1922. The constitution of the new state of Poland also guarantees appropriate rights for national minorities.³⁷ Article 109 of the Polish Constitution states:

"Every citizen has the right to preserve their nationality and to cultivate their language and national characteristics. Specific state laws guarantee minorities in the Polish state the full and free development of their national characteristics with the help of autonomous minority associations. ..."

The protection of life, rights, mother tongue, and traditions of the many non-Polish nationalities was thus initially secured under Polish law and international law in the newly formed state of Poland. However, the "special state laws" provided for in the constitution were never enacted. Poland very soon began to reverse the Russification and Germanization it had previously endured, and with the Polonization of those who were now a minority in Poland, it went far beyond what had previously been imposed on them—at least under German and Habsburg rule.

The first step, beginning in 1922, was the expulsion of non-Poles who had entered the country after 1908, even if they had legally acquired businesses, companies, or land there. These non-Poles were then given the choice of remaining Polish or "opting" for Germany or other countries and emigrating there. Those who opted for Germany, Austria, or the Soviet Union and left the country were initially not compensated for their abandoned possessions, expropriated properties, farmland, or forests. Furthermore, civil servants whose native language was Russian or German were dismissed. Approximately half of the Russian, Jewish, and German schools and universities were forced to close. Bilingual instruction, insofar as it was still being offered after the war, was prohibited by law, and Polish was declared the sole language of instruction. A large number of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Austrians, and Germans had their medical and pharmaceutical licenses, as well as their business and publishing licenses, revoked.

And otherwise, Poland is boycotting all business dealings that are not Polish.

From 1919 onward, undesirable individuals were concentrated and imprisoned in camps near Szczypiorno and Stralkowno. Here alone, 16,000 "enemies of the state" whose mother tongue was German were held. In 1923, similar camps were established near Brest-Litovsk and Bereza Kartuska to concentrate further "enemies of the state." ⁴⁰

³⁷ Constitution of 17 March 1921; Law of

³⁸ 31 July 1924

³⁹ Law of December 1921

⁴⁰ Kendziora, page 22

In 1939, approximately 15,000 minority complaints from Poland reached the League of Nations in Geneva, in which those affected reported and complained about arbitrary acts, violations of law, and harassment by Poles against non-Poles. From March to August 1939 alone, the Foreign Office in Berlin registered 1,500 such cases against Germans.⁴¹ The League of Nations Council had to repeatedly address the situation of minorities in Poland, but it was hardly able to change anything. On June 15, 1932, Lord Noel-Buxton reported to the House of Lords in London on a Council meeting on this topic:

"In recent days, important issues concerning national minorities have been addressed at the meetings of the League of Nations Council. In particular, a report dealing with the so-called terrorizing that took place in Ukraine in the autumn of 1930 was discussed at the January meeting. ... Assimilation through cultural destruction is commonplace. ... No fewer than one million Germans have already emigrated from the Polish Corridor and from Poznań since the annexation, finding the conditions there unbearable. ... In the Polish part of Eastern Galicia, the number of elementary schools was reduced by two-thirds between the end of the war and 1929. At the universities, where Ukrainians held eleven professorships under Austrian rule, they now hold none, even though the Polish government had promised them their own university in 1922. In the part of Polish Ukraine that formerly belonged to Russia, in Volhynia, conditions are even harsher. Here, there is an extensive system of colonization by former Soldiers, and these people are persecuting their neighbors in a most deplorable manner. ... Moreover, throughout Ukraine there is a system of police persecution. ... In this context, we cannot ignore a particularly lamentable fact, namely the torture of prisoners in jails and of suspects who have incurred the displeasure of the Polish authorities. Convincing evidence exists, to my regret, that medieval tortures are being used in such cases. These accounts were described in the League of Nations Council by Lord Cecil, as the delegate of the British government, as disturbing to the conscience of humanity. They were not investigated by the Council, as they should have been. ... I wish to remind Your Lordships of their plight by reading the words of an excellent legal scholar, ... Sir Walter Napier, who wrote the following: "The leaders of the village were surrounded, driven into a barn, stripped naked, restrained, and beaten with thick sticks used for threshing. Doctors were forbidden to speak to the To go from the cities to the villages. And the farmers who tried to go to the cities for treatment-

⁴¹ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 218

Ben were forced to turn back by the police. "... We must not forget that Poland has particular reason to respect these treaties, because the annexations granted to it were granted on the condition that it grant these territories autonomy."

*This provision was established by the Ambassadors' Conference of 1923, in which our country was a leading member. ...*⁴² The particular

interest of the British in the fate of the Ukrainians in eastern Poland, which can be heard here, is explained by the large influx of Ukrainian emigrants to British Canada.

Another problem for non-Poles arises from the very strong identification of all native Poles with the **Roman Catholic Church**. For the past 150 years of foreign rule in partitioned Poland, the Church of Rome has been the refuge of Polish identity. This is now having an effect. For example, after the First World War, being Protestant in Poland became synonymous with being German, and belonging to one of the three Orthodox churches in Belarus and Ukraine is not considered authentic Polish. The formula "Pole equals Catholic" also excludes Jews. Where possible, the new Poland uses the Church to Polonize its minorities. For instance, Warsaw uses a con-

Kordat with Rom⁴³, to banish Russian and Lithuanian from church services in the Catholic churches of Belarus and in the Vilna region-

nen. Polish and Latin take their place.⁴⁴ The Protestant Sunday schools in German, a type of voluntary instruction on holidays, are suppressed by the police.

The new Poland will not be a multi-ethnic state like the Habsburg one before it. It does not see itself as a state with a multitude of religious denominations and nationalities. In Poland from 1920 onward, only those who speak Polish and are Roman Catholic are accepted. On December 14, 1931, the English MANCHESTER GUARDIAN described Polish nationality policy as a "hell".

"The minorities in Poland are supposed to disappear," the paper writes.

"This policy is being pursued ruthlessly, without the slightest regard for public opinion worldwide, international treaties, or the League of Nations. Ukraine has become hell under Polish rule. The same can be said of Belarus with even greater justification. The goal of Polish policy is the disappearance of national minorities, both on paper and in reality."

Belarusians and Ukrainians, as the ancestral majority east of the Curzon Line, are vigorously resisting all attempts at Polonization and Catholicization. When the Polish government

proceeds to expropriate land in Belarus—

⁴² Burneleit, pages 26 ff.

⁴³ Concordat of 10 February 1925

⁴⁴ Castellan, page 156

When the authorities banned the Belarusian language for newspapers and schools in 1924 and 1925, a popular uprising ensued, followed by terror and counter-terror. The country remained in turmoil until its occupation by the Soviet Union in September 1939.

In Ukraine, too, the coexistence of Poles and **Ukrainians** was fraught with tension. After the end of World War II, Ukrainians first committed serious acts of violence against the Poles, whom they remembered as their former oppressors. Then Poland conquered western Ukraine east of the Curzon Line, and revenge raged in the opposite direction. An observer on the ground, the French Slavic studies professor Martel, described the Polish takeover of Ukraine somewhat drastically: *"There was shooting, hanging, torture, imprisonment, confiscation—in short, they were having a great time, just like in the good old days. Many*

Ukrainian priests were executed. To avoid overcrowding, the Poles took no prisoners. ... The prisons of Lviv are overflowing with Ukrainians from all walks of life whose only crime was being Ukrainian or speaking Ukrainian."

....

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The Poles know that the Ukrainians in their country are striving for their own state with the Ukrainians in the neighboring Soviet Union, or at least for unification. This leads to suspicions in Warsaw that the Polish Ukrainians are communists or Bolsheviks and are in league with the Soviets.

Only in 1933 and 34 did the situation in Polish Ukraine ease for a brief respite, when Poland attempted to win over its "own" Ukrainians and those in the Soviet Union to a Greater Ukraine under Polish dominance.

Nevertheless, the mutual hatred between the two nations persisted within the new Poland until the Soviet Union reconquered the country. In 1930, Archbishop Szeptyckyj, Metropolitan of the Greek Catholic Church of Lviv, wrote a letter to a friend in which he lamented:

"We are going through terrible times. The punitive expeditions are ruining our villages, our schools, our economic institutions. Thousands of villagers, six priests, women, and intellectuals have been beaten, often until they lost consciousness. As in wartime, the villages are being subjected to exorbitant contributions and requisitions. The police and army are waging a veritable war against the peaceful, innocent population of our unfortunate country. The pretext that they are only fighting or suppressing communists and terrorists is completely false. That is nothing but a fiction. This is a crisis-ridden escalation of a system of persecution that has continued unabated since 1920."

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⁴⁵ Castellan, page 159

⁴⁶ Castellan, page 161

Poland's large minorities also include 2.5 million **Jews**.

This group is also viewed as a problem by the Polish side. The Polish historian Halecki wrote in his 1970 "History of Poland":

"The Jewish question became particularly pressing before the Second World War. This was a very critical issue, considering that more than three million Jews—almost ten percent of the total population—lived scattered throughout the country, that they constituted an even higher percentage among the urban population, in trade and industry, and in certain professions, and that only a negligible number of them were truly assimilated. Under these circumstances, the emergence of an antisemitic movement, for economic reasons far more than for racial ones, was almost inevitable." In addition to the racial and economic reasons mentioned by Halecki, there ⁴⁷

are likely also partisan political reasons for the low level of integration of Jews among the Poles. Support for the Polish Communist Party is evidently particularly high among members of the Jewish minority, or at least there are suspicions that this is the case. In March 1937, Polish Prime Minister Skladkowski complained in conversation with Professor Burckhardt, the League of Nations High Commissioner in Danzig, that "60% of our Jews are communists and 90% of all communists are Jews."⁴⁸ In Poland, communists are always under suspicion of being sympathizers of the unloved Soviet Union.

In 1935, Polish Foreign Minister Beck established a working group to address "the Jewish question in Poland" and find solutions. As fate would have it, the development of the island of Madagascar became a public issue in France in 1937. Colonists were being sought, but the French showed little inclination to emigrate there. When French Foreign Minister Delbos paid a state visit to Warsaw in December 1937, his host Beck seized the opportunity to ask Delbos "whether he agreed that all Polish Jews should emigrate to the island of Madagascar."⁴⁹ Delbos did not respond to this question.

Prime Minister Skladkowski also held the view that the Jews would be well advised to carry out their emigration in cooperation with the Polish state. He expressed this at a meeting of the Sejm's Budget Committee.⁵⁰ The Jewish population was evidently a constant topic of discussion for high-level Polish politics until the state collapsed in 1939. In 1931, former Foreign Minister Dmowski declared that the Jewish question was the greatest problem for civilization on earth, and he maintained that only the "complete expulsion" of the Jews from Poland could solve the Jewish question.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Halecki, page 234;

⁴⁸ Burckhardt, page

⁴⁹ 73; Rassinier, page

⁵⁰ 127; Meeting of January 14, 1939, see Archive of the Present, page 3889

⁵¹ Hoggan, page 24. Quoted there: *Swiat Powojenny i Polska*, Warsaw 1937, page 317

The antisemitic movement, as Halecki calls it, led to 557,000 Jews leaving their Polish homeland between 1933 and 1938 and seeking refuge in neighboring Germany (from where 170,000 German Jews emigrated during the same period).⁵² The German Reich authorities attempted to deport approximately 50,000 of these fleeing Jews back to Poland. The Polish police prevented the return of these unfortunate people, driving them back to the German side at the borders with bayonets. This expulsion and rejection of Jews is a deeply shameful chapter in the shared history of both Germany and Poland. Poland soon revoked the Polish citizenship of the Jews who had emigrated to Germany and elsewhere. The fate of the Jews remaining in Poland later became a catastrophe after the conquest of the German-occupied part of the country, a consequence of German actions.

Another minority, numbering only 106,000, are the **Kashubians**. These are the descendants of the Pomeranians, the original inhabitants of coastal Pomerelia from the time before the first Polish conquest. Besides their own language, they also maintain their own distinct identity. The political significance of the Kashubians in the 1920s stemmed from their settlement area in northern West Prussia-Pomerelia, where Pomerania and East Prussia were closest to each other. The Poles counted the Kashubians as Poles to demonstrate that the population in the Polish Corridor had always been Polish. The Kashubians' dissatisfaction with their new state authority in Warsaw was interpreted by the Poles as ingratitude and foolishness.

The **German minority** in Poland – initially just over 2 million people –

The population of German-speaking Poland decreased to 1.2 million by 1923 due to the expulsion of the "optants," the emigration of dismissed civil servants who could no longer live there without salaries, the closure of many German schools, expropriations, and terror. At the same time, the German Reich was in a crisis-ridden economic situation. It also had to take in and provide for the people expelled from Alsace-Lorraine and the occupied Rhineland. The Reich government therefore called on the Germans still living in Poland to remain there.⁵³ This, in turn, created suspicion and accusations in Poland that Germany wanted to maintain a minority in Poland and thus assert its claim to lost territories.

The Germans who remained in Poland accepted their fate as second-class citizens under foreign rule only reluctantly. Attempts to forcefully assimilate Germans into Polish society also met with little success. The Poles therefore considered the German minority disloyal and regarded them as foreigners, even though they were now citizens of their state. In September 1934, Poland unilaterally terminated the

⁵² Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 39

⁵³ Strobel, page 23

The minority protection treaty, which Poland had been forced to conclude in 1919 at the behest of the victorious powers, was a key factor in the ongoing efforts of Adolf Hitler from 1934 onward. He sought to resolve the Danzig Question and the Polish Corridor problem in agreement with the Polish government, hoping for concessions and attempting to reduce tensions between the two countries, also to the benefit of the German minority in Poland. These efforts resulted in two treaties: the Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression of 1934 and a minority protection agreement in November 1937.

The latter's impact on the German minority in Poland was short-lived. When Austria and then the Sudetenland were annexed—or occupied, as the Poles saw it—by the German Reich in 1938, Polish fears grew that Germany might also reclaim land and people from the former German Reich. After Poland's annexation of the Teschen region in September 1938, when Hitler demanded negotiations about the future of Danzig and a guarantee of secure transport links to ceded East Prussia, Polish hostility towards their German minority intensified. Acts of terror against Germans, the destruction of German businesses, and arson attacks on German farms escalated into pogroms. After the Memel Territory was reintegrated into the Reich in March, the situation for Germans in Poland became utterly unbearable.

The Poles now consider a war with Germany inevitable.

In mid-August 1939, Poland began the preventive arrest of members of the minority and their deportation to the interior of Poland.⁵⁴ During the summer of 1939, the number of Germans attempting to escape and leaving Poland “illegally” steadily increased. By mid-August, over 76,000 people had fled to the Reich⁵⁵ and an additional 18,000 to the Danzig region. Reports of the Poles' treatment of their German minority and accounts from those who had fled further inflamed German-Polish relations in the final weeks and days before the outbreak of war. The conflict over the future of Danzig thus acquired a second dimension.

With the influx of refugees from Poland in the summer of 1939, outrage over the treatment of Germans in neighboring Poland resurfaced in Germany. The ominous phrase circulated: "When will the Führer put an end to this?"

Contrary to the predictions and wishes of the victorious powers of the First World War, Poland has not developed into a multi-ethnic state like Switzerland. From the outset, it has squandered the opportunity to integrate its minorities into a new homeland. In the new Poland, there has not even been the first attempt to integrate the large minorities of Germans, Jews, Belarusians, and...

⁵⁴ Schulze-Dirschau, page 155 and Rasmus, page

⁵⁵ 115, Stader Tageblatt, August 18, 1939

To win over Ukrainians to their own country. Instead, Poland becomes a state where the titular nation attempts to Polonize the third of its citizens who are not ethnically Polish through coercive measures or to force them to emigrate. The effort to destroy the identity of Germans, Jews, Belarusians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians spirals hatred and terror upwards for almost two decades. Instead of the Poles, as the strongest force in the country, seeking reconciliation and normalization, their chauvinism keeps all the wounds open.

By 1939, no one in Germany or Russia was willing to view the Poles as victims of the three previous partitions, to whom a historical debt was owed. They were now seen as perpetrators against Germans and Russians, burdened by a terrible fate of minority status in Poland. In short, Poland's minority policies led to extreme tensions within the country and to outright hostility towards Poles in almost all neighboring countries. Poland thus became the second of the three multi-ethnic states born in Versailles and Saint-Germain to collapse due to the selfishness of its titular nation. Just as Czechoslovakia before it and Yugoslavia afterward failed due to the inability of the Czechs and Serbs to adequately integrate their minorities into the state, so too did Poland fail.

Germany's fundamental attitude towards Poland

The loss of Danzig and West Prussia, which were entirely or predominantly German-populated, was not accepted by any political force in the German Reich after 1920. A subsequent change to the course of the German-Polish border was therefore the common concern of all parties in the Reichstag, from the far right to the far left. Foreign Minister Stresemann expressed this in a letter,⁵⁶ in which he wrote: *"One of my essential tasks is the correction of the eastern borders: the recovery of Danzig, the Polish Corridor, and a correction of the borders*

*of Upper Silesia: ... That we do not recognize the border in the east, I once expressed in a public speech to the Foreign Affairs Committee, much to the chagrin of the Polish government, when I declared that no German government, from the German Nationalists to the Communists, would ever recognize the border of the Treaty of Versailles."*⁵⁷

Stresemann, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and father of Franco-German reconciliation, expressed the same sentiment once again on December 14, 1925, in a keynote speech on the Locarno negotiations, in which France's borders and possession of Alsace and Lorraine were confirmed:

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⁵⁶ Letter dated September 7, 1925,

⁵⁷ Kern, page 72

"The other set of issues concerned the Eastern questions. We in the West made a commitment to refrain from any attack. We rejected it for the East. ... The League of Nations allows war if an agreement cannot be reached on political issues. ... While I do not seek armed conflict, I do not rule out border changes in the East should the impossible border demarcation there ever lead to circumstances that make this necessary."

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Furthermore, Great Britain also rejected a guarantee of the continued existence of the formerly German territories in favor of Poland during these Locarno negotiations.

The consensus on the desired revision of Germany's eastern border extends far left, not only to German communists. It is supported by communists throughout Europe, remarkably including the Polish Communist Party. Before the Second World War, European communists, in principle, sided with the "oppressed" on the minority question. The declaration of the Communist Parties from January 1933, already mentioned earlier in this book, demands the right to self-determination for all population groups separated from the former German Reich and, if necessary, the return of their land and people to Germany.

Reich. This declaration also explicitly mentions Danzig, Upper Silesia, and West Prussia-Pomerelia. Regarding Poland, it states:

"The Conference notes that the revolutionary proletariat of France, Italy, Poland, England (etc.) ... is waging a relentless struggle against the imperialist and belligerent policies of its own bourgeoisie and against national oppression: ... against the plundering policies of Polish imperialism towards Danzig, against national oppression in Upper Silesia and Pomerelia ... The Conference welcomes the struggle of the Communist Party of Poland for the right of free self-determination of the population of Upper Silesia and the Polish Corridor, Western Ukraine and Belarus until secession from Poland, and for the right of the Danzig population to voluntarily join Germany." Thus, reservations about Germany's eastern border and the status of the city of Danzig existed in Germany long before Adolf Hitler came to power. They were not unique to National Socialist foreign policy. On these issues,⁶⁰

there was a rare consensus among all parties in the German Reichstag. All 16 post-war German governments, in addition to their goal of adjusting the German borders with Poland when the opportunity arose, recognized the danger that Poland itself would annex further German territories. The clarity and frequency of Polish demands for East Prussia, Pomerania, and Upper Silesia in

⁵⁸ Burneleit, page 31

⁵⁹ explicitly

⁶⁰ Burneleit, page 33

The message was unmistakable in public speeches, newspapers, and posters. Germany, with only 10 army divisions and no air force until 1933, could not successfully resist Poland, with its 30 divisions plus its own air force, in the event of an attack on one of its provinces. Thus, the governments, up to and including Adolf Hitler, attempted to weaken the Polish pressure through comprehensive understandings with France and the Soviet Union.

Poland's military thought experiments

Poland's security rests partly on treaties and partly on military force. While the new state initially benefited from the weakness of its large neighbors, its relative troop strength dwindled over the years until, by 1939, very little remained. From 1920 onward, Poland maintained an army of 30 divisions with almost 300,000 men.⁶¹ Even in 1920 and 1921, Poland was able to defeat the troops of its large neighbor, the Soviet Union, in the war and almost annihilate them. For many years, its neighbor Germany, with only 10 divisions, was also no match for Poland.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the situation changed. By 1931, the Soviet Union already maintained 80 army divisions.⁶² In 1939, at the start of the Second World War, Poland, with a peacetime army strength of 35 divisions,⁶³ stood between Germany with 5,164 and the Soviet Union with 143 peacetime divisions.⁶⁵ Poland's disadvantage lay not only in these numbers. It also lay in the fact that Poland, although it spent a full third of all state revenue on its military between the two wars, failed to keep its army's weapons inventory and its air force's aircraft modern. Less decisive—though this is surprising—was Poland's central location, because the Soviet Union and Germany were also countries that were strategically caught in a bind at that time: Germany between France and Poland, and the Soviet Union between Poland and Japan in the Far East.

In retrospect, and knowing Poland's defeat in 1939, it seems grotesque to view Poland as a threat to the German Reich or the Soviet Union. However, from the perspective of the time, Poland, in conjunction with France on the one hand and Japan on the other, was indeed a serious danger to both countries. This now astonishing assessment of Poland by the Germans and the Russians in the 1920s and 30s resulted from

⁶¹ Roos, Poland and Europe, page

⁶² 138; Roos, Poland and Europe,

⁶³ page 32; Ploetz, WWII, Part 2, page 337 (31 divisions and cavalry brigades equivalent to 4 additional divisions)

⁶⁴ Ploetz, WWII, Part 2, page 122;

⁶⁵ Ploetz, WWII, Part 2, page 448

Firstly, this stemmed from the still-fresh experiences of the time; secondly, until 1935, from Poland's attack plans in the event of war; and thirdly, from what is done and said in Poland. The memories of the annexation of "Eastern Poland" and the attempts to conquer Upper Silesia are kept alive by Poland with renewed demands for land and people and with further threats. Poland does not allow wounds to heal.

Poland also had objective reasons to fear the German Reich and the Soviet Union. First, France's leverage against Germany weakened after the latter recognized France's post-war territorial gains at the Locarno Treaties in 1925. Second, it was well known in Poland that Germany did not recognize Poland's territorial gains in areas where the majority of the population spoke German and where the victors had prevented plebiscites. Third, despite Poland's initial military superiority, its western and northern borders with the German Reich were difficult to defend. The Polish perception of East Prussia as a potential gateway towards Warsaw, or the threat posed by that region to Poland's maritime supplies via Pomerania, was a cause for concern. Consequently, Polish defense planning to the west was fundamentally geared towards the threat from Germany.

Until 1935, as long as Poland held the upper hand, its war preparations were based on a joint Franco-Polish plan, the Foch Plan. This plan envisioned a joint attack by both countries against Germany, with the main thrust on Berlin and a secondary Polish attack against East Prussia.⁶⁶ The Polish General Staff had also prepared three supplementary plans: one for a limited attack against Western Pomerania to widen the Polish Corridor, a second for the occupation of Danzig and part of East Prussia, and a third against Central Silesia.⁶⁷ Thus, until 1935, Polish defense meant attacking Germany. Then the regime in Poland changed. After Piłsudski's death in 1935, a successor group under General Rydz-Śmigły assumed power. Around this time, the German Wehrmacht reached the size of the Polish armed forces. The Soviet Red Army, meanwhile, had grown to many times the size of the Polish army. From this point on, Polish war planning focused on defending the country on its own soil. However, the previous idea of defeating Germany from two sides in a joint Franco-Polish offensive still appeared as a strategic objective in the Polish General Staff's "Studium Niemcy" (Study of Germany) from 1935 onward.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Roos, Planning Poland, page 187

⁶⁷ Roos, Planning Poland, page 187

⁶⁸ Roos, Planning Poland, page 191

Even in 1939, the idea of an attack against Germany was not entirely off the table. Poland's defense in 1939 was based on a memorandum by General Kutrzeba dated January 26, 1938.⁶⁹ While the general realistically assumed the Polish armed forces were inferior to the Germans, he believed they could still hold Poland for a few weeks. He anticipated that France would provide military assistance to Poland after not quite eight weeks, and that Germany could then be defeated. Kutrzeba's concept also assumed that, after an initial defensive phase, a war could be won by Poland and France in a second phase with an attack on Berlin. He believed this would occur as soon as the Wehrmacht was forced to withdraw parts of its troops from Poland and deploy them against France.

Regardless of the actual circumstances, past victories against the Soviet Union and Lithuania, along with a pronounced national pride, gave the Poles a military self-confidence that had grown into complete overestimation of themselves. Poland's Foreign Minister, Colonel Beck, the Commander-in-Chief, Rydz-ŹmigŹy, and apparently also the majority of the Polish officer corps, still believed shortly before the outbreak of war that the Polish armed forces were superior to the German ones and that they would defeat the Wehrmacht if necessary. Thus, the prevailing mood in Poland in the summer of 1939 also misled the British and French. It led them to believe that their ally Poland was a significant factor in the anticipated war with Germany. As late as mid-1939, the Polish Minister of War assured his French counterpart, and the Polish ambassador in Paris assured the French Foreign Minister, that if war broke out, it would be the Poles who invaded Germany first, and not the other way around.⁷⁰

Two officials from the London Foreign Office, traveling through Poland on a "fact-finding mission" in May and June 1939, report in their travel log about an encounter with a department head of the Polish General Staff and other officers:

"Partly from him, partly from the other gentlemen, I learned that there were plans to attack East Prussia at the beginning of the war, because it would be difficult for the Germans to reinforce the province quickly and sufficiently"...

Later in the report it continues: *"In any case, it seemed to be the general opinion that East Prussia had to be annexed by Poland."*

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Confidence in their own military strength goes so far that Polish Newspapers, anticipating a certain victory over Germany, maps and

⁶⁹ Schneider, pages 205

⁷⁰ ff. Bonnet, pages 224 and

⁷¹ 252 Foreign Office, SW 1, 9 June 1939, Gladwyn Jebb

Print posters showing the "historical western borders of Poland" along the Elbe River. Although the Poles witness the slow recovery of their two neighboring countries, although they are fully aware of the military build-up in the Soviet Union and Germany, and although they are driven by concerns for their own security, they continue to dream of new expansions. Their dreams do not remain hidden from the Germans, as evidenced by numerous official and unofficial pronouncements.

For example, the following can be read in the GAZETA GDANSK on October 9, 1925:

"Poland must insist that it cannot exist without Königsberg, without all of East Prussia. We must now demand in Locarno that all of East Prussia be liquidated. ... Should this not happen peacefully, there will be a second Tannenberg. ..."

This refers to the Battle of Tannenberg in 1410, in which a Polish-Lithuanian army defeated the army of the Teutonic Knights, initiating their political decline. In 1930, the Piłsudski-affiliated

journal MOCARSTWOWIEC (The League of Great Powers) wrote: "We are aware that war between

Poland and Germany cannot be avoided. We must prepare systematically and energetically for this war. The current generation will see that a new victory at Tannenberg will be inscribed in the pages of history. But we will defeat this Tannenberg in the suburbs of Berlin. Our ideal is to complete Poland's borders along the Oder in the west and the Neisse in Lusatia, and to annex Prussia from the Pregel to the Spree. In this war, no prisoners will be taken. There will be no room for humanitarian sentiments. We will surprise the whole world with our war against Germany."

In September 1930, three years before Hitler's rise to power, Polish Foreign Minister Zaleski declared to Dr. Ziehm, President of the Danzig Senate, that only a Polish army corps could resolve the Danzig question.⁷² In 1934, the Polish Academy of Sciences printed picture postcards depicting King Bolesław Chrobry of Poland in front of a map of Poland on which Germany, including East Prussia, Silesia, Pomerania, the Mark Brandenburg, and Lübeck, was shown as the western part of Poland. The accompanying text read: "In Poland lives the spirit of Bolesław the Brave. The smallest speck of Polish soil returns to the motherland."

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⁷² Miksche, page 66

⁷³ Piekalkiewicz, page 50



Fig. 9: Bolesław Chrobry in front of a map of Poland showing Lübeck, Leipzig and Berlin

Even today, visitors to the Lithuanian Military Museum in Kaunas can admire a Polish map from the 1930s that shows the Mark Brandenburg with Berlin, Pomerania, Silesia and East Prussia as lost Polish territories.

The Polish press continued its work of influencing the country internally and threatening it externally until 1939. On July 20, 1939, the weekly magazine NAROD W WALCE (People at War) commented: "*Danzig must remain Polish and Germany must*

be forced to cede the uninhabited territory of East Prussia to Poland." Here, too – similar to Beneš – the later expulsion of the Germans was already circulating in some minds.



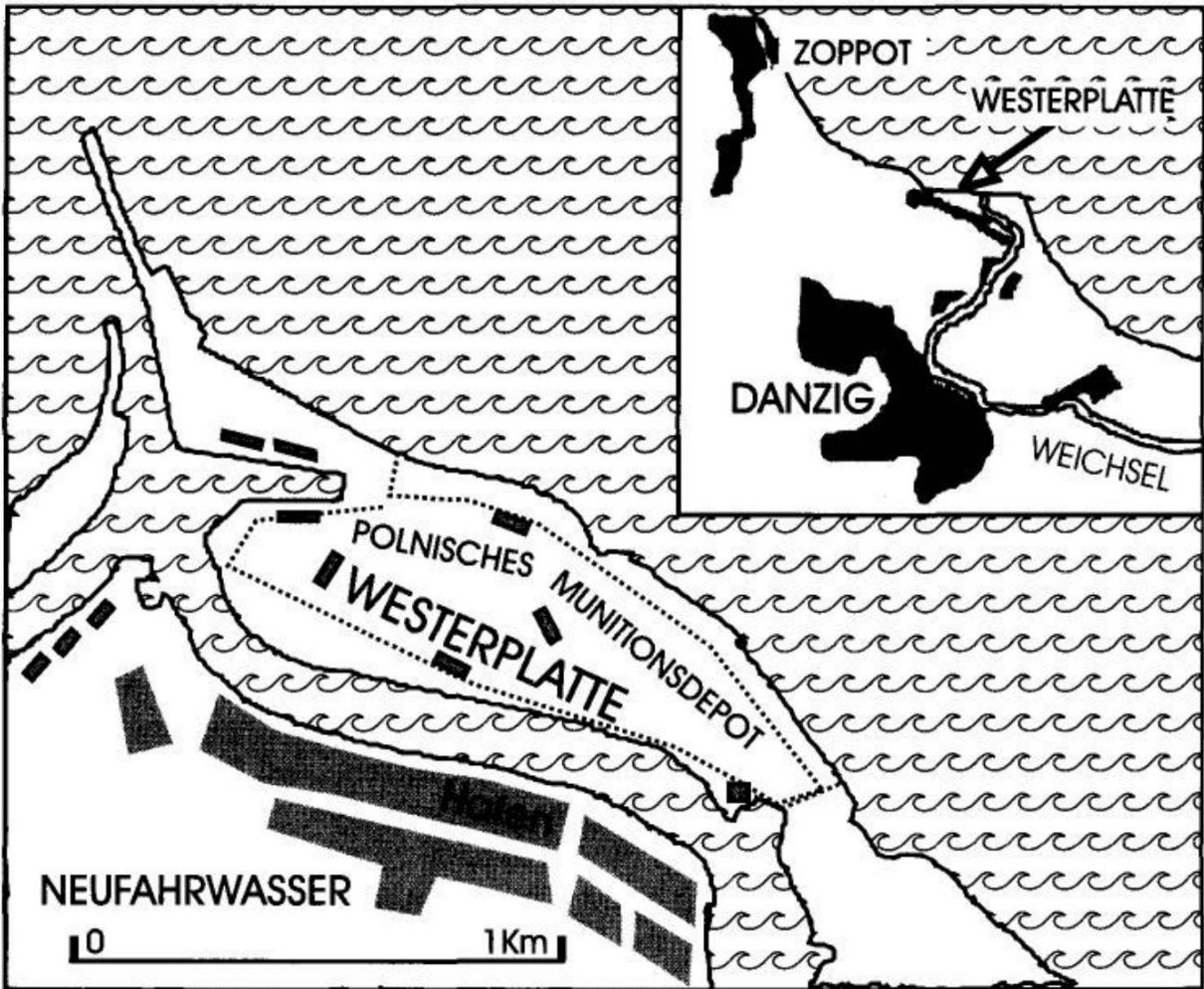
Fig. 10: The “lost” Polish territories in a Polish illustration from spring 1939

Poland did not leave it at mere dreams and such manifestations. In October 1931, Marshal Piłsudski, then head of government in Warsaw, informed US President Hoover that “Poland must confront an imminent attack by irregular German troops and invade Germany to settle matters once and for all.”⁷⁴ Even though this did not come to pass, and even though—as is now assumed—Piłsudski’s intention was merely to dissuade the American political elite from amending the Treaty of Versailles with this announcement, the note nevertheless represents a dangerous thought experiment. The Polish leadership demonstrated its readiness to break the Kellogg Pact, which was only three years old and in which Poland had also signed, renouncing war as a solution to international disputes.

⁷⁴ Roos, Poland and Europe, page 38

In 1932, Piysudski pulled off a strategic move against the hitherto treaty-bound countries of Germany and the Soviet Union. On July 25, 1932, Warsaw and Moscow concluded the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. With this treaty, the Soviet Union assured Poland that it would "provide neither direct nor indirect aid and assistance to the German Reich in the event of a Polish-German conflict."⁷⁵ After being extended on May 5, 1934, the pact was to remain in effect until 1944. It gave the Polish government a free hand against Russia in any potential conflicts with the German Reich in the west.

Poland launched its first test of this newfound freedom of action five weeks after Hitler's rise to power. On March 6, 1933, Piysudski reinforced Polish troops in the Free City of Danzig. He stationed a battalion of marines on the Westerplatte peninsula at the entrance to the port of Danzig.



Map 29: Gdansk and Westerplatte

⁷⁵ Contract Ploetz, Part II, Volume 4, page 114

The League of Nations had contractually granted Poland only a relatively modest guard detail for an ammunition depot there. Thus, instead of a show of force with the German Reich, a confrontation with the League of Nations ensued. The Polish soldiers had to be withdrawn.

The second attempt to exploit Moscow's backing against Germany was of a far greater magnitude. In 1933, Marshal Piłsudski made three attempts to persuade France to join him in a war of aggression against Germany. These attempts have gone down in history as "Piłsudski's preventive war plans." "Preventive" because the Polish marshal was suspected of wanting to preempt the German Reich's efforts at the time to achieve a relaxation of the Versailles arms restrictions during the Geneva disarmament negotiations. The German Reich government's attempt, under Chancellor Brüning, to achieve such a change to the treaty, and the establishment of a militia by the citizens of Danzig, were justification enough for Marshal Piłsudski to "punish" Germany and—it is assumed—to gain further territorial advantages from it.

The first attempt to persuade the French government to wage such a war of aggression against Germany took place in February or March 1933. Piłsudski discreetly sounded out the French as to whether they were prepared for war to force Germany to comply with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. France felt bound by the prohibition of aggression stipulated in the Kellogg Pact and did not accept the offer. The Polish attempt was later denied by Warsaw, but it did not go unnoticed. On February 17, the Polish envoy in Berlin, Wysocki, let slip the information while discussing with Meyer, the head of the Eastern Europe Department at the Foreign Office, the replacements for the German military attaché in Warsaw and the Polish consul general in Königsberg. He asked,

"whether it even makes sense to fill these positions anymore, since we are on the eve of a war between Germany and Poland."

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After the war, the Historical Commission of the Polish General Staff also mentioned the Polish exploratory talks in Paris.⁷⁷

The second Polish exploratory meeting in Paris regarding a preventive war took place in mid-April 1933. Poland was then gripped by anti-German unrest. During this period, the Marshal ordered troops to be deployed. Cavalry was concentrated in Pomerelia, near Danzig, and on the border with East Prussia. Elite troops were withdrawn from Poland's eastern border and also redeployed there.

In the second half of April, Hitler was first informed by Ambassador von Moltke from Warsaw about the Polish government's attempts to annex France.

⁷⁶ ADAP, Series C, Volume I, Document 22

⁷⁷ Polish General Staff, 1951, Volume I, Part 1

to induce a preventive war against Germany.⁷⁸ After France, even following Piysudski's second exploratory talks, showed no inclination to engage in a joint war alongside Poland against Germany without good reason, the Polish head of state sought another way to counterbalance the growing influence of its neighbor, Germany. On November 15, 1933, he sent the Polish ambassador in Berlin, Lipski, to inquire with the German Reich government whether there was a way to provide Poland with reassurance against Germany after Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations.⁷⁹ Hitler offered Piysudski a treaty of friendship and non-aggression. On November 24, the German ambassador, von Moltke, presented the draft treaty to the Polish Foreign Ministry. Then, for six weeks, there was radio silence between Warsaw and Berlin. During this period, Piysudski made a third attempt to persuade Paris to preempt a future German rearmament through a preventive war.⁸⁰ When France again rebuffed him, the Polish leader decided to change his foreign policy. On January 9, 1934, the German-Polish Pact of Friendship and Non-Aggression was signed. This brought a period of relative calm for four years.

The Polish considerations of invading the German Reich and the three exploratory talks with the French government would hardly have come about without the Russo-Polish treaty. With its own troop deployment and a simultaneous French attack against West Germany, the Polish army could have conquered East Prussia and Danzig in 1933 without further risk.

The Westerplatten Affair of 1933 and the revelations of Polish war exploratory talks in Paris had a twofold impact on the newly elected Hitler. On the one hand, he now sought rapprochement with Poland, against which Germany would have been no match in a 1933 war. On the other hand, Hitler became acutely aware that Poland would pose a threat to Germany's rear as soon as there were conflicts with France. He also noted that Poland disregarded the Kellogg Pact, which prohibited war as a means of resolving international disputes, whenever it suited its own interests. When Hitler delivered the second and third of his now-famous "key speeches" to the Wehrmacht leadership in May and August 1939, he articulated precisely what he had witnessed six years earlier—freshly appointed to power. Poland and the Western powers, who had been Germany's adversaries in the war, were not only playing into each other's hands; Poland was also inciting conflict against Germany. Hitler told the high-ranking generals on August 22, 1939: "It was clear to me that sooner or later a confrontation with Poland was inevitable." These words of Hitler's certainly would not have been

⁷⁸ Roos's preventive war plans, page 361

⁷⁹ Contract Ploetz, page 126

⁸⁰ Roos, Preventive War Plans, page 359

This was necessary to inform the generals and admirals about Poland. The high-ranking officers themselves knew at the time that since 1918 Poland had always been lurking behind Germany's back, seizing opportunities to profit, break treaties, and drum up support for war against Germany in France.

Poland's alliance policy

The second pillar of Polish security policy is a network of treaties.

Initially, **France and the collective of victorious powers** established this network. The latter bound Poland to a minority protection treaty in order to defuse the foreseeable potential for conflict posed by the newly created minorities and to deprive the homelands of these minorities of grounds for later intervention or reconquest. Poland, as already mentioned, perceived this arrangement as discriminatory and denounced the treaty in 1934, even though it was part of the Treaty of Versailles. In scholarly literature, the Polish minority protection treaty is therefore sometimes referred to as the "little Versailles Treaty." With this denunciation, Poland undermined the structure of the Paris Peace Treaties for the second time. The first time was with the non-recognition of the Curzon Line. The Polish governments thus dismantled a peace order to which they nevertheless repeatedly invoked themselves; an order that might later have protected Poland.

The relationship between Poland and France

Of the victorious powers, it was especially post-war France that wove a network of bilateral treaties to encircle post-war Germany. The sum of the small and medium-sized states of Eastern Europe, which France bound against Germany through its network, called itself the "**Little Entente**," in **reference to the First World War alliance**.

Poland became France's main partner in this Little Entente against Germany. On February 19, 1921, the two states concluded an alliance treaty. The core of the treaty was the promise to provide mutual assistance in the event of an unprovoked attack by a third party. The treaty was supplemented on the same day by a secret military convention that regulated all the details of French support in the event of a German or Soviet attack against Poland.⁸¹ France's intention behind the treaties, however, was that Poland would support France with troops against Germany should France ever need it.⁸²

⁸¹ Gamelin, Volume II, page 466

⁸² Taylor, page 55

When the German Reich government recognized France's territorial gains from the First World War in Locarno in October 1925, France's interest in receiving Polish support waned. Paris replaced the existing alliance treaty of 1921 that same month with a new, but weakened, guarantee treaty, which reflected the declining French interest. Firstly, the new guarantee treaty no longer contained any provisions for the protection of Poland in the event of a Russian attack, and secondly, it made the provision of assistance to Poland contingent upon a prior League of Nations decision.

In 1936, when Hitler ordered troops to march into the demilitarized Rhineland zone, thereby restoring military sovereignty in his own country, France felt too weak to prevent it. It no longer made use of its option to activate the Little Entente for a "punitive action" against Germany. From then on, at the latest, Warsaw also knew that Paris was no longer counting on Poland. Nevertheless, after the German occupation of the Rhineland, the governments in Paris and Warsaw agreed to reinstate the old alliance treaty of 1921.⁸⁴ However, just a few months later, in August 1936, it became clear to the Polish military that France's commander-in-chief, Gamelin, was no longer willing to make precisely defined commitments regarding the nature and timing of French intervention in the event of a German attack against Poland.⁸⁵ From then on, there was no longer any guarantee for Poland that France would oppose with all its might any German attempt to revise the German-Polish border at a later date.

Between 1920 and 1934, there was a passionate debate in France about the right and wrong, sense and nonsense of Clemenceau's Versailles policy.

It is quite clear that the dispute between the Germans and the Poles over Danzig and the Polish Corridor is a product of their own "peace order." Politicians and the media are publicly debating what options might exist to defuse this persistent risk to European peace. Meanwhile, for the average Frenchman of the 1920s and 30s, it is clear that in the event of war, he would not be prepared to go to war again in Poland's interests.

However, official France continues to consider it wise and useful in foreign policy to maintain "a Polish foot in the German door".

The relationship between Poland and Great Britain

Great Britain only assumed the role of a "protecting power" of Poland shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. London's stance towards Warsaw after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles remained very distant for a considerable time. It was certainly recognized in England that the transfer of control over Poland was a significant step.

⁸³ Franco-Polish Guarantee Treaty of 16 October 1925; Roos,

⁸⁴ Planning Poland, page 190;

⁸⁵ Roos, Planning Poland, page 192 and Gamelin, Vol. II, pages 230 f.

The expulsion of two million Germans to the new Poland, the creation of the Free State of Danzig, and the Polish land corridor between East Prussia and the Reich itself created the conditions for another war. Even during the negotiations that the victors were conducting in Versailles regarding the fate of the vanquished, British Prime Minister Lloyd George presented a memorandum in which he prophesied, with a nasty barb against Poland:

"The proposal by the Polish commission to place 2.1 million Germans under the supervision of a people of a different religion, a people who have never in their history demonstrated the capacity for stable self-government, must, in my estimation, sooner or later lead to a new war in Eastern Europe. ..."

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The distance London maintains towards Warsaw is also fueled by minority policies in Ukraine. The large group of Ukrainian emigrants in British Canada ensures that the undignified treatment of Ukrainians in Galicia does not go unnoticed in England.

Although England itself contributed to Poland's rise to naval power in 1919 through a Baltic corridor and port rights in Danzig, it was unwilling to be permanently bound by this. While Great Britain calculated that Poland's new fleet would tie down parts of the Soviet and German Baltic fleets in future conflicts in this inland sea, England was nevertheless unwilling to provide guarantees for the corridor and Danzig. London wanted the new Poland to bind the Soviets and the Germans, not England. Poland's leader, Piłsudski, would soon learn this lesson.

In 1925, during the Locarno negotiations, Piłsudski unsuccessfully attempted to obtain a British guarantee for the German-Polish borders. Foreign Minister Chamberlain then explicitly declared that England would not guarantee these borders.⁸⁶ London's foreign policy on this issue evidently reflected public opinion at home. The Manchester Guardian opined that England would never guarantee Poland's borders. And The Times wrote that the new borders in Eastern Europe were no longer tenable. When Poland raised the question of guaranteeing its borders again at the September 1927 meeting of the League of Nations, it had to acknowledge that the British government still refused. The political climate in Great Britain, on the other hand, was turning against Poland. Churchill, then a Conservative MP, said in a speech to the House of Commons on November 24, 1932: *"If the British government really wishes to do something to promote peace, then it should take the lead and address the question-*

⁸⁶ Burneleit, page 22 (Memorandum Lloyd George of March 25, 1919 entitled "Some Considerations for the peace conference before it finalizes its conditions.

⁸⁷ Burneleit, page 33

The wars against Danzig and the corridor will be reopened as long as the victorious powers remain superior. If these issues are not resolved, there can be no hope for a lasting peace."
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Churchill also recognized that the status of Danzig and West Prussia-Pomerelia could not be maintained indefinitely.

Fourteen months after this Churchill speech, Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich. With the treaty concluded between Hitler and Piłsudski in 1934, British interest in German-Polish relations evaporated for a good four years.

In 1938, with the German desire for the return of the Sudeten Germans to the Reich, Poland also came back into focus in English foreign policy.

Poland considers its claim to West Teschen as justified as Germany's claim to the Sudetenland and demands the cession of the disputed territory. In the lead-up to the Munich Conference, London initially shows understanding for Warsaw's wishes, but ultimately refuses to address them there. Following the consensus reached at the Munich Conference, Germany receives the former Habsburg territories of Czechoslovakia, which are predominantly German-populated.

West Teschen, with only a third of its population being Polish, was supposed to remain part of Czechoslovakia according to the will of the four powers at the Munich Conference. When Poland nevertheless annexed West Teschen, London was outraged. This was the state of British-Polish relations a little less than a year before the outbreak of war. Nothing at the time indicated that a year later, in the German-Polish conflict over the Danzig, Polish Corridor, and minority issues, England would side with Poland and declare war on Germany.

Poland's relationship with the Soviet Union

This was initially established by the Treaty of Riga , in which the Soviets ceded parts of Belarus and Ukraine to Poland in 1921. For the Russians, this remained an open wound; for the Poles, a stepping stone. Marshal Piłsudski, who envisioned a new Poland within the borders of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of 1569, pursued a federation as the long-term goal of his foreign policy, in which Lithuania, all of Belarus, and all of Ukraine would be protectorates under Polish rule. All Polish governments therefore tolerated the government-in-exile of a non-existent Ukrainian republic in Warsaw. In 1927, when the Soviet envoy Voykov was assassinated in Warsaw by a Russian exile, Soviet-Polish tensions escalated to such an extent that both countries began preparations for war, which then—

⁸⁸ Kern, page
⁸⁹ 82; Treaty of Riga of 18 March 1921;
⁹⁰ Roos, Poland and Europe, page 12

But it didn't happen. In 1929, Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov succeeded in persuading Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states to sign a regional "pact against war," anticipating the Kellogg Pact, which had not yet been ratified by all countries. They signed the "Litvinov Protocol" on February 29, 1929, which stipulated that wars between these states would be used to resolve international disputes in the future. This provided Poland, including its disputed territories in "Eastern Poland," with initial contractual protection against Russia.

From September 1931, with the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, Russia's concerns shifted to the Far East. The Soviet Union resumed earlier negotiations on a non-aggression pact with Poland. On January 23, 1932, a treaty to this effect was initialed in Moscow and signed in July. This Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact contained the crucial provision for Poland that, in the event of a German-Polish conflict, the Soviet Union would "provide neither direct nor indirect assistance or support to the German Reich for the entire duration of the conflict."⁹¹ Thus, Poland was protected from the Soviet Union by another treaty. However, this treaty also lost its effect in 1938 when Poland, against Russia's warning,⁹² seized the remainder of the Teschen region from Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union, also allied with Czechoslovakia since 1935, had previously threatened Poland—as already mentioned—with the termination of the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in the event of a Polish attack on Czechoslovakia. Thus, with the annexation of Teschen, Poland violated and effectively nullified two treaties with the Soviet Union: the Litvinov Protocol of 1929 and the Non-Aggression Pact of 1932. Both treaties had originally been offered to Poland by the Soviets. While it is true that the Soviets later also violated other non-aggression pacts, for example with Finland, Estonia, and other countries, and that the two treaties with Poland would likely have been broken if necessary, the breach of the Litvinov Protocol clearly originated with Poland. With this unilateral territorial acquisition at the expense of their Czech neighbors, Poland also disregarded the Kellogg Pact, which has already been cited several times. They themselves tore up the treaties that could have protected their "Eastern Poland" from the Soviets. Poland is hunting like a shark in a shark tank until it is eaten itself.

Poland's relationship with Czechoslovakia

The relationship between neighboring Czechoslovakia and Poland remained cool and distant during the 20 years of their independence. Both countries were multi-ethnic states with similar problems, which they addressed with only a weak sense of loyalty.

⁹¹ Roos, Poland and Europe, page

⁹² 34 Soviet note to the Polish government of 23 September 1938

Both countries have their ethnic minorities. Both are therefore confronted with the demands of their minorities' parent nations. Both the Poles and the Czechs would thus have had reason to unite. However, a few differences separate the two neighbors. Firstly, there is Poland's demand for the Czechoslovakian part of the Cieszyn industrial region. Secondly, and conversely, there is the open support of the Czechs for the independence aspirations of the Ukrainians in neighboring Polish Galicia. And thirdly, there is the support of the Poles for the Hungarians, who want to reclaim the Hungarian-populated border regions of Czechoslovakia.



Map 30: Border areas with Hungarian and Polish minorities

Thus, in this region, everyone makes deals with their neighbor's enemy instead of seeking reconciliation and solidarity with their neighbor. Moreover, the Polish leadership—much like the Germans—very early on came to the conclusion that Czechoslovakia, as an artificial product of Versailles, was not viable and would inevitably disintegrate due to internal national conflict. When French diplomacy attempted to integrate Poland into an anti-German coalition to support Czechoslovakia before the Sudetenland crisis of 1938, it experienced this firsthand. The French were given a cold rebuff.

Polish Foreign Minister Beck informs the French Ambassador Noel in Warsaw that “Czechoslovakia must disappear in the near future” and that Poland itself is preparing “to take part of the legacy.”⁹³ The Polish Ambassador in Paris, Count Łukasiewicz, gives French Foreign Minister Bonnet a similar message. Łukasiewicz replies,

⁹³ Bonnet, page 41

"that Czechoslovakia, an arbitrary composite of numerous extremely hostile minorities, was a country doomed to die. To want to defend it nonetheless was a grave error."

France and Great Britain."

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With Poland's troop buildup in Teschen, the threat of war in the last week of September 1938, and the occupation of West Teschen on October 1st, Polish-Czech relations were irrevocably ruined. Aside from the domino effect this action later triggered in the Soviet Union and the German Reich against Poland, Poland now had another enemy.

Poland's relationship with the German Reich

The basic outline of German-Polish relations has already been described. When Foreign Minister Stresemann crowned his efforts at friendship and reconciliation with France in 1925 with the Pact of the Rhine and the recognition of the Franco-German border, Marshal Piłsudski attempted to obtain the same concessions and guarantees for the German-Polish borders and for Poland's territorial gains. The German Foreign Minister rejected Piłsudski's demands and openly declared that while Germany would not start a war, it was awaiting an opportunity for a new arrangement in the border regions. Poland, for its part, persisted in its efforts to gradually and through numerous maneuvers extricate Danzig from the League of Nations mandate and incorporate it into Poland. Furthermore, the many semi-official and private voices in Poland demanding Silesia, East Prussia, and Pomerania for Poland continued to make their case. Thus, until 1933, the relationship between the two countries was burdened by the double burden of German claims on Poland and Polish desires for more German land.

Only Adolf Hitler broke with this rigid German stance. He saw Poland as the land of an ancient people who, unlike the Czechs and Slovaks, had never in history been entirely part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. For Hitler, the Polish state was a buffer between the "Third Reich" and the communist Soviet Union, which he so detested. Although, or perhaps precisely because, Poland attempted to prevent Germany's resurgence after his accession to power through a preventive war and other machinations, Hitler offered the Polish dictator, Marshal Piłsudski, a pact of friendship and non-aggression, which was signed by both sides in January 1934—a treaty for a period of 10 years.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Bonnet, page

⁹⁵ 41 D-PO Treaty of 26 January 1934. See Contract-Ploetz Part II, Volume 4, page 125



Fig. 11: Propaganda Minister Goebbels visiting Marshal Piłsudski after the signing of the German-Polish Treaty, from left: the envoy Count Moltke, Piłsudski, Goebbels, the Polish Foreign Minister Beck.

Piłsudski sees through the shift in circumstances to Poland's disadvantage. He registers France's waning interest. He views the French rapprochement with the Russians with great concern. He knows Hitler's alternative: to form a coalition with the Soviet Union instead of Poland. Furthermore, he is aware that Germany's rearmament can hardly be prevented in the long run. Hitler, on the other hand, hopes to persuade Poland to compromise by significantly reducing German revisionist demands and providing Poland with support for its Eastern ambitions. Piłsudski harbors his own desires for a Greater Polish federation with a semi-dependent Ukraine under Polish dominance. Hitler, too, has ambitions regarding Ukraine. He sees the part of Ukraine east of Poland's borders as a future colony for Germany. Both dictators know that this can only be achieved against the Soviet Union, and each hopes to eventually exploit the other's "visions" for his own benefit.

Since the conclusion of the German-Polish agreement of 1934, relations between Berlin and Warsaw have been largely positive.

This remains the case even after Piłsudski's death. Even regarding the Polish-German differences over minorities and territories, it sometimes appears as if...

Solutions were not out of the question. François-Poncet, France's ambassador to Berlin, reported as an observer of the scene: *"Colonel Beck (Poland's*

foreign minister) was on familiar terms with Göring, who accepted an invitation every year to go hunting in the Polish forests. At these friendly gatherings, the Danzig question and the Polish Corridor were naturally discussed—that is, problems that would one day have to be resolved in the interest of good relations between the two countries. Colonel Beck indicated that Poland would not refuse to return Danzig to the Reich if it retained economic privileges there. Poland would also agree to an extraterritorial highway and railway line between West and East Prussia." The treaty with Germany gave Poland a free hand for other territorial acquisitions. In 1938, when the Sudeten Germans wished to leave the Czechoslovak state, the Polish government saw its opportunity. On September 20 and 24, 1938, she had

Ambassador Lipski in Berlin ask first Hitler and then von Ribbentrop

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whether Poland could exploit the current Sudetenland crisis and wrest the still Czech part of the Teschen region from the weakened Czechoslovakia.⁹⁷ Hitler had no objection but at the same time expressed the hope that an amicable agreement could soon be reached on the Danzig question as well. Poland then attacked the internally fractured and no longer able to defend itself Czechoslovakia and annexed it on September 1.

October 1938 Teschen and its industrial area.

What followed was a series of futile attempts by the German side to resolve the Danzig and Polish Corridor problems through negotiation. The core of the German compromise proposals was the offer to definitively recognize the Polish territorial acquisitions of formerly German land between 1918 and 1921. These were territories in Upper Silesia, West Prussia, and the Province of Posen. Marshal Piłsudski had repeatedly and unsuccessfully requested this recognition from 1920 until his death in 1935. The 16 Reich governments before Hitler had refused to grant this Polish wish. Hitler now offered the requested guarantee in exchange for two "bargains": the reintegration of the old Hanseatic city of Danzig, which was not Polish under international law anyway, into the Reich, and extraterritorial access routes into the detached East Prussia. The Reich government made six unsuccessful attempts at negotiations. The series of talks begins on October 24, 1938, and continues with ever new attempts on November 19, 1938, on January 5, 1939, on January 25 and 26, 1939, on

⁹⁶ François-Poncet, page 213

⁹⁷ Rassinier, page 230

⁹⁸ ADAP, Series D, Volume V, Document 81

⁹⁹ ADAP, Series D, Volume y Document 101

¹⁰⁰ ADAP, Series D, Volume Y Document 119

¹⁰¹ (No protocol known)

The negotiations continued on March 21, 1932 , and April 28, 1933 , until the final offer to Poland was submitted on August 30, 1939. On October 24, 1938, three weeks after Poland had received Teschen and Oderberg, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop proposed an eight-point program to his Polish counterparts for resolving German-Polish problems. These eight points, with modifications, remained the basis for all subsequent German offers up to and including the one on August 30, 1939. They were as follows:

- "1. The Free State of Danzig returns to the German Reich."*
- 2. An extraterritorial, German-owned Reichsautobahn (national motorway) and an equally extraterritorial multi-track railway will be built through the corridor.*
- 3. Poland shall also retain an extraterritorial road or motorway and railway and a free port in the Gdansk region.*
- 4. Poland receives a sales guarantee for its goods in the Gdansk region.*
- 5. The two nations recognize their common borders (guarantee) or their respective territories.*
- 6. The German-Polish treaty is extended from 10 to 25 years.*
- 7. Poland joins the Anti-Comintern Treaty.*
- 8. The two countries add a consultation clause to their treaty."*¹⁰⁵

Despite all previous efforts by both sides to maintain relations, an internal Polish development is now beginning that is overshadowing the dialogue between the Polish and German governments. Since 1937, the overall political climate in Poland has been changing. First, Beck's "understanding" with Germany is under attack. Second, the persecution of minorities reaches a new peak, and third, the Polish press is turning on everything German. This leaves Beck with virtually no room to maneuver on the Danzig question.

On November 19, 1938, Ambassador Lipski informed Ribbentrop in a meeting that his Foreign Minister, Beck, would be unable to agree to Germany's demands regarding Danzig for domestic political reasons. On the same day, Beck's official reply to the German proposal reached Adolf Hitler. It was polite, but also noncommittal. Beck attempted to avoid making a concession on Danzig by stating that a comprehensive solution for all remaining disputed issues had to be sought. The German proposal that Poland join the anti-Soviet Anti-Comintern alliance was also unacceptable to Warsaw. As a neighbor, Poland could not so openly oppose Russia without negative consequences. Consequently, the "Anti-Comintern proposal" did not appear in any further German negotiating offers.

¹⁰² ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document

¹⁰³ 61; ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document

¹⁰⁴ 276; AA 1939, No. 2, Document 466, Annex

¹⁰⁵ II; ADAP, Series D, Volume V, Document 81

Even after this rejection from Warsaw, Poland would still have had the chance to negotiate a Danzig solution with Germany in exchange for certain concessions to its own advantage, or—if things turned out worse—to accept a *fait accompli* regarding Danzig, even without suffering any territorial losses of its own. Hitler still hoped for a negotiated solution. On January 5, 1939, Poland's Foreign Minister Beck visited the German Chancellor at the Berghof, the Alpine residence near Salzburg. At this meeting, Hitler was still hoping for a certain degree of gratitude for Oderberg and Teschen. He reiterated the proposal from October, again offering recognition of the lost territories as Polish property. In return, he demanded Danzig and extraterritorial transit routes.¹⁰⁶ Hitler summarized the Danzig proposal as follows: *"Danzig will politically join the German community and remain economically part of Poland."* Even the corridor was to remain Polish.

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Once again, the Polish foreign minister is not accommodating him in the slightest. However, he assures Hitler that "he would like to consider the problem calmly."¹⁰⁸ They part with the promise to continue searching for solutions. Peace is not yet lost.

The German side made a third attempt on January 25, 1939, with a return visit by Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop to Warsaw. Again, nothing changed that could lead to progress on the Danzig question. And once more, despite fundamentally different views, the door was not closed. The final communiqué of the meeting speaks of a

*"Agreement that both present and future issues affecting both states should be examined and resolved while respecting the legitimate interests of both nations."*¹⁰⁹

Both sides remain interested in a harmonious coexistence. However, the German government still seeks to alleviate the damage left behind by Versailles. It wants Danzig, and it is prepared to definitively relinquish West Prussia, the province of Posen, and Upper Silesia in its place. The Polish government, on the other hand, wants to maintain the status quo. It is also unwilling to accept the newly proposed formula, "Danzig will become politically part of Germany and remain economically part of Poland," as a compromise.

Thus, even at the end of January 1939, no negotiated solution that could permanently end the German-Polish dispute was in sight.

¹⁰⁶ v. Weizsäcker Papers, pages 153 and 511

¹⁰⁷ ADAP, Series D, Volume V, Document

¹⁰⁸ 119 ADAP, Series D, Volume V, Document

¹⁰⁹ 119 Archive of the Present, page 3908

This January attempt by Ribbentrop to resolve the Danzig question through negotiations was—it must be added here—torpedoed by France. Just seven weeks earlier, Ribbentrop had concluded the Franco-German Non-Aggression Pact, had once again contractually renounced Alsace and Lorraine, and had returned home with the subjective impression of a "free hand in the East." Thus, during his January visit to Warsaw, Ribbentrop could reasonably expect that France would not oppose his negotiations in Poland. However, on the very first day of his stay in Warsaw, the French government intervened and made it clear to the Poles that they could count on the full backing of the British and French regarding Danzig. On January 26, well-timed to coincide with Ribbentrop's visit to Beck, the French Foreign Minister Bonnet delivered a speech on the fundamental principles of his foreign policy before the National Assembly in Paris.

*"... In the event of war, if England and France were to be involved, all of Great Britain's forces would be at France's disposal, and likewise all of France's forces would be at Great Britain's disposal.
Regarding relations with Poland, it suffices to recall that the Polish Foreign Minister Beck declared that Polish-French friendship remains one of the foundations of Polish policy....¹¹⁰*

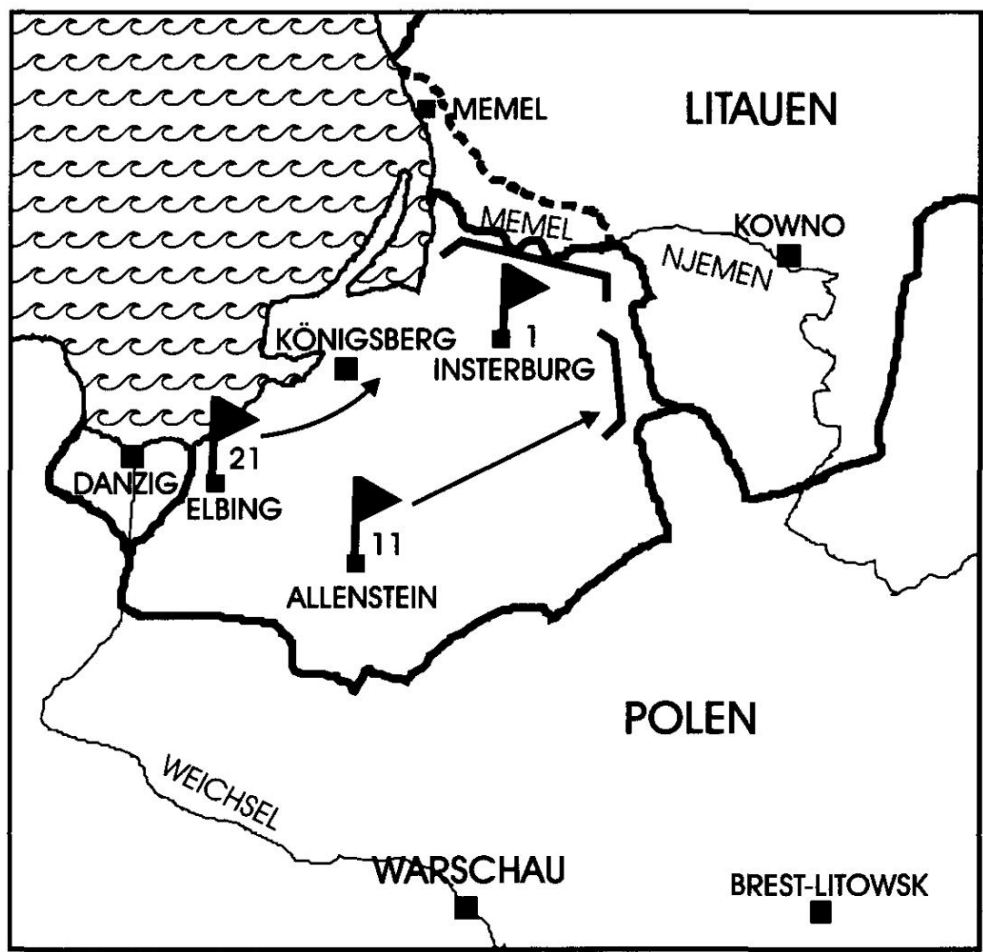
Prime Minister Daladier emphasized in the same session *"that it is important to categorically reject the demands of certain neighbors."*

Since Czechoslovakia had not yet disintegrated at that time, and since the German Reich had not yet occupied the remaining Czech territory, Bonnet, in his war talk, could only be referring to a conflict over Danzig. Similarly, Daladier's admonition to "categorically reject the demands of certain neighbors" could only have meant the Poles, and not the Czechs, in January 1939. Thus, Bonnet's and Daladier's words constitute an undisguised appeal to Warsaw to reject the German demands for Danzig "categorically." The mention of England's and France's readiness for war on that day of Ribbentrop's visit to Warsaw was also not a casual remark.

In January 1939, when Germany was still only demanding Danzig and the transit routes, offering in return the final renunciation of West Prussia, Posen, and Upper Silesia, France rejected such a solution. At this point, the intention could not yet have been to punish Germany for the occupation of Czechoslovakia. The French were clearly concerned with preserving the remnants of Versailles and preventing a final reconciliation between the Germans and the Poles.

¹¹⁰ Paul Karl Schmidt, pages 64 f

Six weeks after the Warsaw Summit, Poland had an opportunity to openly repel future German pressure with England's backing. This opportunity arose when, on March 16, 1939, Hitler ordered German troops to march into the remaining part of the disintegrating Czechoslovakia, and the German population in the detached Memel Territory demanded annexation to the German Reich in a popular uprising. The latter was significant because, five days later, the Reich government relocated the three Wehrmacht divisions stationed in East Prussia northward to the border of the Memel Territory.¹¹¹ Poland managed to exploit both the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the presence of German troops on the Memel border.

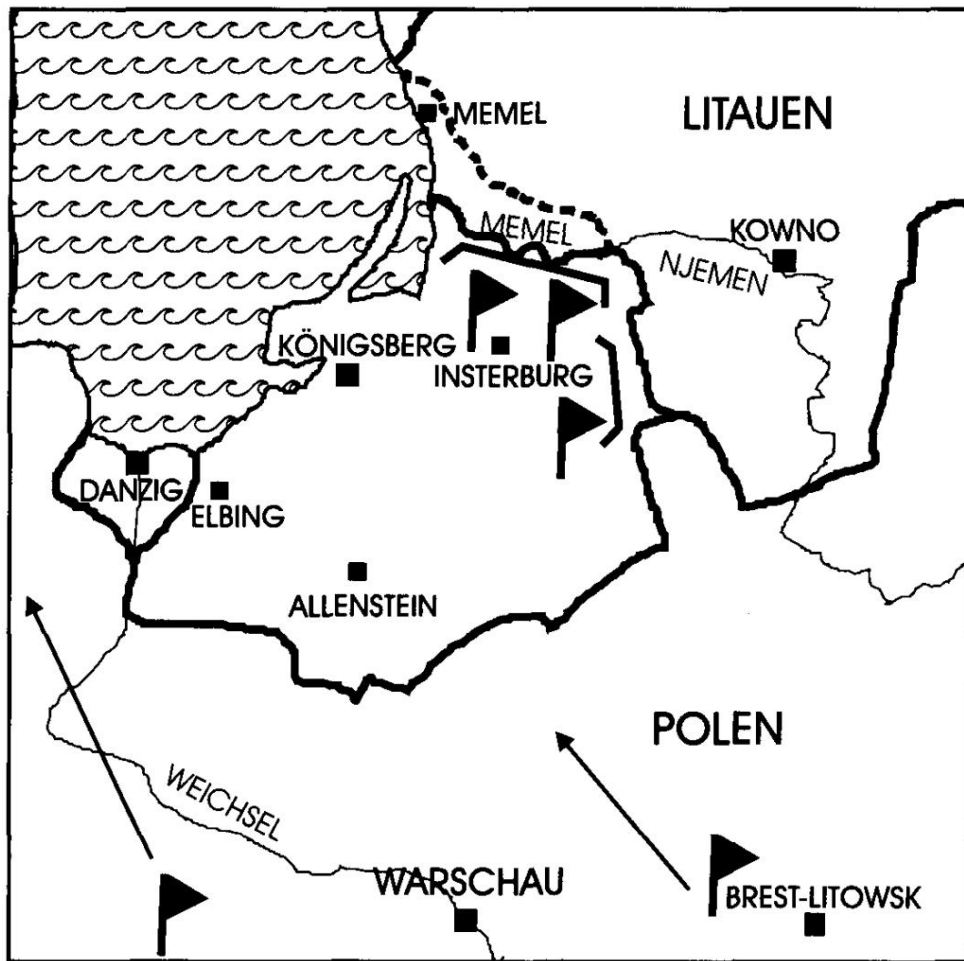


Map 31: March 21, 1939 German troops march on the Lithuanian border

With the annexation of Czechia, Hitler is annexing a non-German country for the first time, acting against the express will of France and England to maintain Czechoslovakia as an independent state in East Central Europe. Poland's Foreign Minister Beck takes advantage of British anger and asks the London government for a protection agreement against Germany. Poland's Marshal

¹¹¹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 101

Rydz-ymiggy simultaneously used the deployment of German troops to the Memel border as a dubious tactic. Claiming that the Germans intended to annex Danzig, he mobilized part of the Polish armed forces, called up three years of reservists and thousands of specialists to the barracks, increased the army's strength by over 330,000 soldiers, and marched combat units toward Danzig and Pomerelia.¹¹²



Map 32: March 1939 Deployment of Polish troops to the Borders with East Prussia and Western Pomerania

This rapid and unforeseen turn of events coincided with the German Foreign Minister's next attempt to resume negotiations with Poland regarding Danzig's future. Von Ribbentrop observed the simmering tensions among the Poles and sought to prevent a further escalation of anti-German sentiment there. On March 21, he requested that Ambassador Lipski travel to Warsaw and convey to his government the official German request for renewed negotiations. This marked the fourth attempt by Germany to resolve the Danzig issue through negotiation.

¹¹² Taylor, page 271 and Roos, Planning Poland, page 194

Almost simultaneously, Poland's request for a protection treaty was submitted to London. The British agreed, and Poland abruptly shifted to a new approach towards Germany. Instead of negotiating bilateral disputes as stipulated in the 1934 German-Polish treaty, Poland now made the Rydz-ymigjy gesture. Warsaw partially mobilized and deployed troops outside the city, the very area that Germany had wanted to negotiate. This threatening gesture in response to a request for negotiations contradicted the spirit of the German-Polish treaty, in which the two contracting parties had agreed to resolve their disputes through dialogue.

"Under no circumstances, however, will they resort to the use of force to settle such disputes." At that time, there was not a single ¹¹³ threat against Poland from the German Reich government.

On March 26, 1939, Ambassador Lipski returned to Berlin and delivered a memorandum of reply,¹¹⁴ in which the Polish Foreign Minister conveyed his commitment to good-neighborly German-Polish relations and his willingness to engage in dialogue. However, the reply, while embellished with diplomatic pleasantries, amounted to a clear rejection of the two German demands. According to the Polish position, there could be no extraterritorial transit routes through Pomerelia, and regarding Danzig, the Polish minister proposed jointly guaranteeing the existing status of the Free State. The significance of the note lay in the exchange surrounding its delivery. After receiving and reading the Polish memorandum, von Ribbentrop told Lipski that this response to the German request concerning Danzig offered no solution. He insisted that the only viable path forward was the reintegration of Danzig into the Reich and the establishment of extraterritorial transit routes. Lipski's response is that *"he has the unpleasant duty to point out that any further pursuit of these*

*German plans, especially insofar as they concern the return of Danzig to the Reich, will mean war with Poland."*¹¹⁵

Here, the first threat of war between Poland and the German Reich appears. And it is a Pole who utters it. Poland is banking on war to keep Danzig outside the Reich, instead of paving the way for Danzig's return. The threat of war, which is now repeated more frequently, is broadly defined. Even the "continued pursuit of German plans," says Lipski, means war. Strictly speaking, this would also include all further German negotiating offers. Here, Lipski, as the official spokesman for Poland, violates not only the spirit but also the text of the German-Polish Treaty.

¹¹³ Contract Ploetz, page 127

¹¹⁴ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 101 and IMT Document, Volume XLI, Document

¹¹⁵ 208, and AA 1939 No. 2, Document 208

The first threat of war from Poland is printed and preserved in the records of this conversation in the pre-war files of the Foreign Office (AA 1939) and in the files of the Nuremberg Trials.¹¹⁶ It is interesting to note that this threat is no longer to be found in the same transcript of the conversation, which was republished after the war in the "Akten der Deutschen Auswärtige Politik" (ADAP – 1956).¹¹⁷ An original copy of this record of the highly sensitive conversation of March 26, 1939, can no longer be found in the archives of the Foreign Office.

Following Lipski's dangerous statement on the subject of war, von Ribbentrop, in view of the deployment of Polish troops on the edge of the Danzig territory, responds: *"that, for example, a violation*

of Danzig territory by Polish troops would be regarded by Germany in the same way as a violation of the Reich borders."

This threat from the German side is printed in both versions of the cited document. Thus, the shorter, post-war version of the "Documents of German Foreign Policy" contains only the German threat. The initial threat of war, uttered by Lipski, is no longer mentioned after the war.

According to this account, both sides declared from March 26, 1939, onward that changing or not changing the status of Danzig against their own interests would mean war. Von Ribbentrop informed the "Führer" that same day of the very harsh reaction from Poland. Hitler instructed the minister to inform the Polish ambassador that, of course, no solution to the German-Polish differences could be found on this basis. Von Ribbentrop reported that Hitler added the remark to this instruction: *"Of course, we mustn't speak of war here."* Beck, however, instead of also offering reassurance, went even further. On the 28th...

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In March, he summoned the German ambassador in Warsaw, von Moltke, to his ministry to convey his view on the preceding threats.¹¹⁹ He made it clear to von Moltke that he understood the German foreign minister's statement to the Polish ambassador.

*"A Polish attack against the Free City of Danzig would be thwarted by the
The Reich government views it as an attack against Germany"*

I answer with my own statement,

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¹¹⁶ IMT Document, Volume XLI, Document 208

¹¹⁷ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 101.

¹¹⁸ IMT Negotiations, Volume X, page 299;

¹¹⁹ Polish White Paper, Document No. 64

"that any intervention by the German government to change the existing status quo in Danzig will be regarded as an attack against Poland."

Von Moltke replies: "They want to negotiate on the tips of bayonets."

The Polish minister has thus officially reaffirmed that any change in Danzig in line with German wishes will trigger a war between Poland and the German Reich. It is now clear that for Germany, the only remaining choice regarding the Danzig question is between renunciation or war with Poland.

The door to a solution limited to Gdansk, without involving Poland, has thus been slammed shut.

Three days after Poland's clear rejection, on March 31, 1939, the British government announced that England guaranteed Poland's independence from Germany. This included the implication that Great Britain would fight against Germany in a German-Polish dispute over Danzig.

The Polish announcement that they would prefer war to compromise, the provocative mobilization, and England's intervention in the last days of March 1939 deprived Hitler of any further hope of achieving his goal in the Danzig question through his previous approach alone. He now added the military option alongside further negotiations and ordered preparations for an attack against Poland. On April 3, Adolf Hitler issued the directive for "Case White." This order instructed the Wehrmacht to prepare an attack against Poland so that it could be launched on September 1, 1939. The political context for this directive is found in its first section: *"German relations with Poland will continue to be governed by the principle of avoiding disruptions. Should Poland alter its hitherto principled policy towards Germany and adopt a stance threatening the Reich, a final..."*

"Accounting will be necessary." Poland

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dances on the volcano from April 3, 1939. The eruption is expected on the 1st. September is the forecast.

Hitler saw the mobilization in response to an offer of negotiations and the British-Polish agreement, which was clearly directed against Germany, as a breach of the German-Polish Friendship and Non-Aggression Treaty of 1934, which he therefore denounced four weeks later. Hitler announced the denunciation on April 27 in a memorandum to the Polish government and the following day in a speech to the Reichstag. In the memorandum and the speech, he once again recognized Poland's claim to West Prussia-Pomerania and its own access to the Baltic Sea. He offered to negotiate new contractual arrangements between the two states. This was the fifth German

¹²⁰ OKW, Directive "Case White" of April 3, 1939, see dtv-Hitler's Directives, page 19

¹²¹ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, pages 288 ff

An offer to finally resolve the points of contention between Germany and Poland through treaties. Hitler makes no mention of force or war against Poland in either the memorandum or his Reichstag speech. Even with the return of Danzig, the path to peace between the German Reich and Poland would still be open.

Meanwhile, in Poland, the situation was viewed quite differently. On May 5, 1939, Foreign Minister Beck explained his policy of maintaining the status quo and rejecting German demands before the Sejm, the parliament in Warsaw.¹²² The status of the Free City, he said, was not based on the Treaties of Versailles, but on the city's centuries-long affiliation with Poland. Danzig's wealth, he claimed, was the result of the foreign trade that Poland conducted on the Vistula River via Danzig's port. He conveniently omitted the fact that the Vistula had silted up under Polish administration for the past 19 years, and that no ships could navigate it anymore. Beck asked the plenary session of parliament what Germany had to offer Poland in exchange for Danzig. The German government's offer to recognize all territorial acquisitions of formerly German territories by Poland after the First World War as definitively Polish was, he asserted, no offer at all.

The territories in question are "de jure and de facto¹²³ indisputably Polish." Thus, the German demand for Danzig and for extraterritorial transit routes is nothing more than taking without giving anything in return.

Beck omits the fact that Marshal Piłsudski had repeatedly asked the German Reich governments for precisely this recognition during his lifetime. Beck concludes, in essence:

"A nation that respects itself does not make unilateral concessions."

On the same day, May 5, the Polish government responded to the German denunciation of the non-aggression pact with a note.¹²⁴ In it, it stated that Poland was, firstly, willing to negotiate; secondly, that Germany had always promised to respect Polish rights in Danzig and that this should remain the case; and thirdly, that the reply sent by Lipski on May 26th was no longer valid.

I delivered the delivery in Berlin in March, and have already made concessions to the Germans. They offered to jointly guarantee Danzig's continued independence and promised further administrative simplifications on transit routes. However, Danzig's annexation to the German Reich and extraterritorial transport routes were out of the question.

The Polish note of May 5, 1939, demands respect for Poland's rights in the Free City of Danzig, but these rights were essentially guaranteed in the rejected German Danzig proposal. Furthermore, Poland demands in the note that Germany continue to adhere to the 1934 non-aggression pact because the

¹²² British War Bluebook, Document 15

¹²³ according to the legal situation and in reality

¹²⁴ British War Bluebook, Document 16

The agreement cannot be terminated before the expiration of 10 years. It is conveniently ignored that the partial mobilization of the Polish army and the deployment of troops outside Danzig on March 24th were themselves violations of the 1934 agreement. Furthermore, the Polish government, in its note, invokes the Kellogg Pact, which it has already violated four times. In essence, the Polish note of May 5, 1939, proposes nothing other than that

Germany should guarantee Danzig's continued existence outside the German Reich in conjunction with Poland.

Although Great Britain has clearly and openly sided with Poland in the Polish-German conflict since Hitler's violation of international law with the remainder of Czechoslovakia, doubts about the Polish government's stance persist there as well. For example, on May 4, 1939, the British ambassador, Henderson, wrote from Berlin to his minister, Lord Halifax, in London:

"... Once again, the German cause is far from being unjustified or immoral... My thesis has always been that Germany cannot return to normality... as long as its legitimate demands have not been met. The Danzig Corridor question, along with the Memel problem, was one of these. ... According to my Belgian colleague, almost all diplomatic representatives here consider the German offer surprisingly favorable. The Dutch envoy, the American chargé d'affaires, and my South African colleague have also expressed this view to me..."

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Following Beck's dismissive reply and his Sejm speech of May 5, Hitler realized that the annexation of Danzig was impossible without the threat of war and probably even without war with Poland. He decided to attack Poland "at the first suitable opportunity."¹²⁶ Much to Poland's detriment, Adolf Hitler now abandoned his previous small-scale Danzig solution and turned to a larger Poland solution. Even more significantly, he now included Poland in his hitherto vague ideas of "living space in the East." In this hitherto undefined concept of living space, Poland had been, in Hitler's imagination, a potential participant until May. Now Poland became a victim. Hitler addressed this for the first time in his speech to the top generals on May 23, 1939.

What followed was like a slide down a slippery slope. In June and July 1939, the persecution of minorities in Poland, border incidents, and pressure from Danzig increased to such an extent that tension-free negotiations between the Polish and German governments were no longer possible. At the end of July and beginning of August, a dispute between Poland and the Danzig Senate over customs services in the Free State further strained German-Polish relations.

¹²⁵ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume V, page 422 ff.

¹²⁶ Formulation from Hitler's "Generals' Speech" of May 23, 1939

The Danzig Senate gave in on Hitler's advice, and Polish and French newspapers reported that Hitler had caved to Poland's firm stance.¹²⁷ The dispute now also began to take a psychological turn. Hitler wanted success. The price had become secondary.

In the final weeks before the outbreak of war, Hitler attempted to put the Poles under pressure by issuing open threats. He used this opportunity through talks in London, via the League of Nations' representative for Danzig, Professor Burckhardt, and through a Swedish mediator named Dahlems. The threats and British mediation prompted the Polish Foreign Minister Beck to declare on August 28th that he was in agreement with renewed German-Polish negotiations regarding Danzig's future. However, Beck evaded German demands for talks in the following days.

On August 30, 1939, at the very last minute, Hitler put forward a new offer—as the Germans saw it—or rather, a new demand—as the Poles saw it. Hitler wanted to win the British over to his side and therefore left a bridge open for the Poles to cross. The German proposal, hastily drafted by diplomats and lawyers, resembled the previous ones. It still demanded the annexation of Danzig to the Reich.

But he is also demanding – and this is new – a referendum for the people in the so-called corridor.

The relevant passages in the German proposal read: “2.

The area of the so-called corridor, ..., will be divided into sections.”

They can decide for themselves whether to be subservient to Germany or to Poland.

3. *To this end, this area will hold a vote. ...*

To ensure an objective vote, this aforementioned territory, similar to the Saar region, will be placed under the authority of an international commission to be formed immediately, comprised of the four major powers: Italy, the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain.

4. *The Polish port of Gdynia is excluded from this area. ... which is fundamentally Polish territory. ...*

8. *In order to guarantee, after the plebiscite, the security of free traffic between Germany and its province of Danzig-East Prussia, and between Germany and Poland and its connection to the sea, if the plebiscite area falls to Poland, Germany will be granted an extraterritorial traffic zone for the construction of a Reichsautobahn (national motorway) and a four-track railway line. If the plebiscite is in favor of Germany, Poland will receive the same rights for free and unrestricted traffic to its port of Gdynia. 128*

¹²⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 212 and 217

¹²⁸ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 482-185



Map 33: The German proposals of August 30, 1939

This is the sixth and final offer from the German side. Hitler is now leaving the Poles no room to play for time. He sets a deadline for the start of talks. He “expects” Warsaw to send an authorized negotiator to Berlin by midnight on August 30, 1939. Foreign Minister Beck refuses to accept either the time pressure or Berlin as the venue for the negotiations. He instructs Lipski in the German capital not to accept the new German proposal.¹²⁹ One day and five hours after the proposed and “expected” date for the start of new talks has passed without result, the Wehrmacht invades Poland.

Hitler's final offer, which the Poles thus ignored, worsens the situation with the demanded plebiscite.

¹²⁹ Dahlems, page 112

The basis for action for the Poles, yet once again the Reich government makes no demands on the formerly German territories in the province of Posen and in East Upper Silesia. Both Posen and East Upper Silesia, with their rich ore and coal deposits, would have been of great value to the German Reich as well. Even the proposed plebiscite area, designated as the "corridor," is somewhat smaller than the former German province of West Prussia.

Even though Hitler demanded more from Poland with this last demand than in the previous five negotiating offers, he nevertheless claimed little. With his demand for a plebiscite in West Prussia-Pomerelia, he adhered to the former demand of US President Wilson for "popular participation in the settlement of any territorial and sovereignty problems"¹³⁰ and to the identical proposal of the then British Prime Minister Lloyd George during the Versailles Conference of the victors, to allow the inhabitants of the disputed territories to vote in a plebiscite on their affiliation with Poland or Germany.¹³¹ Even Hitler's proposal for an international commission to oversee the plebiscite originated with Lloyd George.

There are two interesting comments on this latest proposal from Berlin.

One comment comes from the French historian Rassinier, who wrote after the war: *"Had the French and British*

people been aware of these proposals on August 30, Paris and London could scarcely have declared war on Germany without provoking a storm of indignation that would have enforced peace." The second comment is from the wife of the British First Lord of the

Admiralty, Cooper.¹³² Upon hearing of the German proposal, she found it "so sensible" that it horrified her husband. The thought that the English public might react similarly to Hitler's proposal prompted him to immediately call the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph and urge the editors to present the German proposal in the most unfavorable light possible.¹³³

Looking back at Polish-German relations during the 20 years between the two wars, it can be said that Polish behavior was quite aggressive in the early years and became defensive after Germany's recovery. Warsaw insists on maintaining the status quo established at Versailles with regard to its own possessions. However, this status quo includes Danzig, West-

¹³⁰ Wilson speech from July 4, 1918 in Mount Vernon

¹³¹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 482

¹³² Rassinier, page 291

¹³³ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 486

There were too many differences between Prussia, Posen, Upper Silesia, and the treatment of the German minority in Poland for the Treaty of Versailles to be sustainable in the long run. Poland, which had no qualms about using force to change the status quo of Versailles with Lithuania, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia, defended its own status quo without the slightest compromise. Since Poland sought to preserve its existing possessions in the conflict with Germany, while Germany demanded changes, the burden of proof ultimately fell on the German Reich. Nevertheless, Poland could not benefit from the fact that, under international law, it was in a better position with the Versailles status quo in 1939 than the German Reich was with its demands. Despite its 50-year guarantees from England, Poland lost both war and freedom.

The Polish government certainly had other options in 1939. It had the chance to form an alliance with the German Reich without having to sacrifice any of its own territory. Danzig, which is the subject of this discussion, is not, after all, part of the Polish state. Poland could very well have played its part as a free country, as Germany's sovereign, smaller partner. Throughout history, Poland has repeatedly acted as a "bulwark of the West" against the invasions of the Mongols and Magyars. It could—according to Hitler's initial vision—have once again assumed this role, this time in alliance with Germany against Bolshevism, which the Soviets were then trying to export to the West.

In another role, the Poles could have secured their territory, freedom, and peace by providing cover for Germany. Since 1933, Hitler had been striving to break the ring of the anti-German coalition that France had formed around the Reich with the Little Entente. Hitler was not picky in this endeavor. Given his obsession with the eventual outbreak of war with France and Great Britain, a peaceful and allied Poland at his back would have been worth a great deal to him.¹³⁴ It is not without reason that

Hitler offered Poland a 25-year pact.

In 1939, Poland was itself a dictatorship, much like Germany, where the human rights of minorities were as disregarded as the human rights of Jews and "dissidents" in Germany. Poland's decision in favor of Western democracies in 1939 was not a turning toward kindred nations. It was primarily a pact with the enemies of its own enemy. Furthermore—something the Poles overlooked in their selfishness—it was also an alliance with two countries that, driven by the same selfishness, had twice abandoned them: France and Great Britain, once against Germany in 1939 and again against the Soviet Union in 1945.

¹³⁴ See Hitler's statements recorded in the Hossbach Protocol.

Poland and the Kellogg Pact

Another treaty that could have protected the Poles is the aforementioned Kellogg Pact¹³⁵ of 1928, in which the USA, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Poland, Germany and others declare *"that they condemn war as a means of settling international disputes and renounce it as a tool of national policy in their mutual relations."* (Article 1)

They agree:

"that the settlement and resolution of all disputes ... which may arise between them ... shall never be sought except by peaceful means." (Article II)

The major flaw in the treaty for Poland is the preamble. It stipulates that

"Any signatory power that goes to war should be declared to have forfeited the benefits conferred by this treaty."

After Poland attempted to incite France to war against Germany in 1933, and after it threatened first Lithuania and then Czechoslovakia with war in 1938, it was obvious that Germany and the Soviet Union would follow the recommendation and no longer allow the Kellogg Pact to apply to Poland.

The balance sheet

In the balance sheet, Poland has little to show for itself in 1939. Its foreign policy of constantly seeking advantages without maintaining its own alliances became a game of musical chairs for Poland. It changed its position so often that in the end, it had nowhere to sit. After initially annexing territories from four neighbors, the new Poland was dependent on treaties and allies.

Poland quickly lost the patronage of the League of Nations and the sympathy of England through its brutality against its minorities. France's affection for Poland faded after Germany relinquished Alsace and Lorraine. Warsaw has known this since at least 1933. The Kellogg Pact has been violated so often that Poland can no longer expect any protection from it.

The treaty with Russia was sacrificed in 1938 for 80,000 Poles in the Teschen region and half of an industrial area. The treaty with Germany was disregarded when the German Reich government requested talks regarding Danzig, prompting Poland to call up reservists and mass troops outside the city. Germany wasn't even demanding land that would be Polish under international law. The treaty Poland subsequently concluded with England offered Poland no security. England wanted to clip Germany's wings, not save Poland.

When things got serious, Great Britain effectively abandoned the Republic of Poland first to the Germans and then to the Soviet Union. After nearly two decades of newfound sovereignty, Poland found itself in the ruins of its foreign policy in August 1939; three weeks later, it was itself in ruins.

¹³⁵ Treaty on the Outlawing of War of 27 August 1928, the so-called Kellogg Pact or Pact of Paris

Hitler's Poland plans

There are very different opinions regarding Hitler's intentions concerning Poland. Some historians believe that Hitler viewed Poland very early on as the first step in his plans for world conquest. Others maintain that Hitler did not have such far-reaching plans and tend to think that Poland had a chance to exist as a middle power alongside Germany. According to this school of thought, Hitler only decided to conquer Poland very late in the game.

If one assumes that Hitler often deceived those around him, that he generally kept his thoughts and desires to himself, then the truth about this is virtually impossible to ascertain. If, on the other hand, one is inclined to believe that he expressed his intentions partly openly and partly deceptively, then the search for his plans for Poland becomes easier. Let us attempt the second approach here.

Hitler's comments on the Polish question in his book "Mein Kampf" are still quite brief and vague. He devotes only two passages to this topic.

In his book, Hitler merely criticizes the earlier attempts by the Austrians and Prussians to Germanize their Polish minorities, with the aim of imposing German as the language on the Poles. He describes how "Germanization" was only lasting where the land in question was settled by German farmers after its conquest.¹³⁶ This text in "Mein Kampf" is a purely retrospective analysis. It lacks any reference to a revision of borders he envisioned, or even to a later conquest of neighboring Poland. "Mein Kampf" cannot serve as proof of an early intention on Hitler's part to later attack Poland.

In 1923, Hitler—then only 34 years old—explained in his book what motivated him at the time. His deeply felt national identity played a major and decisive role in his thinking. Hitler's national consciousness had developed in the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire, where Germans had become a 23 percent minority alongside a predominantly Slavic and Hungarian majority. Consequently, his ideas in "Mein Kampf" revolved repeatedly around the survival of Germanness in this now Slavic-majority environment. Thus, in 1923, Adolf Hitler viewed world politics as a struggle between nations for their place on Earth. The experience of being a minority in his own country evidently instilled in Hitler an animosity toward all Slavs, whether Poles, Czechs, or Russians. Even this, however, does not necessarily imply that Hitler was already contemplating war with Poland when he wrote his book.

¹³⁶ Hitler, pages 297f and 429f

Ten years after "Mein Kampf," Hitler became Chancellor. His first appearance before the commanders of the Reichswehr on February 3, 1933—four days after he himself had taken office—reflected the fundamental attitude described above. The newly appointed Chancellor Hitler spoke to the top generals and presented his program to them in broad outline for the first time: the struggle against Versailles, the reconstruction of the Wehrmacht, and the promotion of the German economy and foreign trade. On the latter topic, he explained that

*"Perhaps new export opportunities would have to be fought for, or perhaps – and this would probably be better – new living space would have to be conquered in the East" and would have to be ruthlessly Germanized."*¹³⁷

This reference inevitably brings to mind the later conquest of Poland. However, Poland is not mentioned in the quoted speech. Thus, it remains unclear whether Hitler was already thinking about Poland in February 1933. For the generals present, Hitler's remarks on Versailles were self-evident. They certainly received his assurances about rebuilding the Wehrmacht with relief. After all, the two heads of government before Hitler had already intended to begin this process. Given the realities of 1933, the new Chancellor's considerations regarding Lebensraum in the East likely struck the generals more as half-baked musings than as a serious declaration of intent. The generals' primary concern at that time was the Reich's ability to defend itself, and nothing more. Nevertheless, Hitler speaks here of Lebensraum in the East, but Poland is not mentioned.

One might have expected Hitler to continue the Polish policy of all his predecessors since 1918 and to pursue a hard line against Warsaw. This was all the more likely given that Poland had accompanied Hitler's accession to power with the provocation of a troop landing on the Westerplatte peninsula near Danzig and with an attempt to incite France to a war of aggression against Germany. Hitler learned of Poland's war intentions in April 1933.¹³⁸ Now, his reaction is astonishing.

Instead of retaliating in kind, Hitler sought peace with the Poles. In January 1934, a German-Polish non-aggression pact was concluded at Germany's suggestion.¹³⁹ Although the treaty renounced war as a means of resolving the dispute, Germany reserved the right to negotiate future solutions for its own territorial demands.

After Marshal Piłsudski's failed attempts to incite France to war against Germany, Poland also relented. The two dictators, Hitler and Piłsudski, discovered a partial convergence of interests, which then led to a period of calm in German-Polish relations for the next five years. The regimes of Poland and the German Reich were at an understanding.

¹³⁷ Jacobsen, page

¹³⁸ 81; Roos, Preventive War Plans, page

¹³⁹ 361; German-Polish Non-Aggression Agreement of January 26, 1934

The era, with its national self-absorption, authoritarian forms of government, rejection of parliamentarism, anti-communism, and regrettably also anti-Semitism, was quite similar to the Soviet Union. Hitler and Piłsudski saw Bolshevism as a pressing threat to Germany, Poland, and ultimately all of Europe. Both had an interest in separating the part of Ukraine east of the Polish border from the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁰

Piłsudski envisions a federation of his country with a unified Ukraine under Polish suzerainty. Hitler, however, has a long-term goal in mind, one he envisions for a later time when Germany will have overcome the damage of Versailles. This is compensation for the colonies lost in 1918 through a new colony in Ukraine. Thus, in 1933 and 1934, a few cautious and non-committal exploratory talks take place between Warsaw and Berlin regarding the possibility of joint action in Ukraine, but nothing more.¹⁴¹

Hitler's conduct towards Poland from 1933 to 1939 represents a turning point in German foreign policy towards the east. The governments before 1933 had consistently demanded changes to Germany's eastern borders, to Poland's detriment. This included the possibility of adjustments in West Prussia-Pomerelia and Upper Silesia. A key element of this policy before 1933 had been the rapprochement between Germany and the Soviet Union. Hitler, however, sought closer ties with Poland and distance from the Soviet Union. Adolf Hitler also wanted a revision of the borders, but he limited Germany's demands from the outset to what he believed would be a minimum acceptable to Poland: the return of the city of Danzig, which was not part of Poland anyway, and extraterritorial transport routes through the Polish Corridor.

Hitler hoped to persuade the Poles to make concessions on the Danzig Corridor issue by giving them free rein to pursue their own ambitions in Eastern Europe. Hitler's miscalculation lay in believing that the Poles would consider relinquishing formerly German West Prussia and agreeing to a border adjustment in Upper Silesia a concession. What Hitler saw as a fair compromise, the Poles perceived as an attack on their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their national dignity. Hitler's illusions were shattered only when Warsaw, after agreeing to Poland's annexation of Oderberg and Teschen in 1939, showed not even the slightest sign of accommodating Germany's demands regarding Danzig. This was also the point at which Hitler reverted to relying on Moscow's influence over Danzig and the Corridor.

Following the signing of the German-Polish Friendship and Non-Aggression Treaty in January 1934, five years of German-Polish understanding and peace ensued, even though the fate of the German minority in Poland continued to smolder as a conflict between the two nations. There were no indications of a change in Hitler's

¹⁴⁰ Jacobsen, page 82. Jacobsen's portrayal of Ukraine's interests is characterized by a one-sided selection of Documents falsely portrayed as a purely German concern.

¹⁴¹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 179f

Polish policy reappears only in the speeches that the "Führer" delivers secretly and in private to the top generals of the Wehrmacht. On the 5th...

In November 1937, Hitler spoke for the first time to the General Staff and his Foreign Minister von Neurath about war and his plans to annex Austria to Germany and annex Czechoslovakia.¹⁴² Poland, however, was only mentioned as a peripheral issue. In the speech, Hitler twice expressed his hope and expectation that Poland would remain neutral in any wars Germany might wage against third-party states. There was no indication, therefore, of any intention on the part of the Chancellor to ever take action against Poland. On the same day, November 5, 1937, Germany and Poland concluded a new minority protection agreement. This, too, can hardly be interpreted as an indication of Hitler's later intentions toward Poland.

Two weeks after the general meeting, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Danzig are briefly mentioned again. On November 19, the British Member of Parliament and later Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, in coordination with Prime Minister Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary Eden, visits Hitler at the Berghof. He is to explore possibilities for cooperation between the German Reich and England. During his conversation with Hitler, Halifax speaks of a *"change in the European order, which will probably occur sooner or later. Danzig, Austria, and Czechoslovakia are among these issues. England is only interested in these changes being brought about through peaceful developments..."*

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This conversation must make Hitler believe that England will not cause him any difficulties later during negotiations with Poland regarding the annexation of Danzig.

Following the annexation of Austria by the German Reich in March 1938, Hitler and his Foreign Minister von Neurath held a meeting on April 24th, during which the dictator stated that he believed he was at the height of his foreign policy successes. Hitler is quoted as saying that one must not overextend oneself.¹⁴⁴

At the time, Hitler evidently did not anticipate that he would be unable to resolve the still unresolved Danzig question in the near future in the same way as he had resolved the Rhineland problem in 1936 and the Austrian question shortly before. It appears that Hitler harbored illusions that he could reach an amicable agreement with Poland with considerable concessions. This impression is further reinforced by the aforementioned speech from November 1937, in which Hitler foresaw a war with England and France between 1943 and 1945. Poland was, for Hitler,

¹⁴² Speech of November 5, 1937, reproduced in the so-called Hossbach Protocol.

¹⁴³ ADAP, Series D, Volume I, Annex to Document 31

¹⁴⁴ of the Weizsäcker Papers, page 126

In 1937 and 1938, he was evidently still the uncertain Cantonist whom he would rather bind to himself and Germany than wage war with.

This stance evidently remained unchanged until the Sudetenland crisis. On the 26th.

In September 1938, Hitler announced to a large audience in the Berlin Sportpalast: *"We recognize that there are two peoples here who must live side by side, and neither can eliminate the other. A state of 33 million people will always strive for access to the sea."*

Therefore, a way of reaching an understanding must be found. In September¹⁴⁵ 1938, the Teschen question led to a rapprochement between Warsaw and Berlin. Hitler now hoped for gratitude for the support regarding Teschen and for compensation for the concession to annex the predominantly German town of Oderberg to Poland. Hitler, who otherwise had a keen instinct for opportunities, failed to seize this favorable chance to commit the Warsaw government to a Danzig solution. Instead, he relied with misplaced confidence on the now positive state of German-Polish relations and let a few weeks pass unused. Hitler and von Ribbentrop tentatively, then directly and later urgently, petitioned the Polish government on October 24 and November 19, 1938, on January 5, 25, and 26, 1939, and finally on March 21 and April 28 to resolve the still unresolved Danzig problem and the extraterritorial transit connections through the corridor on the Danzig River. to resolve and regulate through negotiation. Ribbentrop's first proposal to Lipski, dated October 24, 1938, has already been presented in full earlier in this book in the description of Polish alliance policy.¹⁴⁶

Already in the first two meetings, on October 24 and November 19, Lipski informed Ribbentrop that Beck had no room for maneuver regarding Danzig due to domestic political considerations. On November 19, Beck politely but firmly rejected the German demands concerning Danzig. Hitler now had a solution prepared without Poland's blessing. On November 24, the "Führer" instructed the army to make preparations for a swift occupation of Danzig from East Prussia.¹⁴⁷ The route from East Prussia avoided the need for German troops to enter Polish territory. Hitler supplemented his instruction to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Colonel General von Brauchitsch, with an oral explanation in which he said:

"In any case, I intend to take this measure only if Lipski makes it clear that the Polish government does not want to support a voluntary surrender of Danzig to its people and

¹⁴⁵ Domarus, Volume I, page

¹⁴⁶ 925; ADAP, Series D, Volume V,

¹⁴⁷ Document 81; Directive of 24 November 1938; IMT Documents, Volume XXXIV

her situation would be made easier by a "fait accompli" created by Germany."

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Hitler was still hoping for a solution in November 1938 that would allow him to limit the conflict. A war with Poland was clearly not on his agenda at that time. An intact Poland was too valuable to him as a buffer between Germany and the Soviet Union.

Even at the beginning of 1939, it still seemed as if a solution in line with German wishes was possible. The French ambassador in Berlin, François-Poncet, reported his assessment of the situation in January 1939:

"Hitler suggested constructing an extraterritorial passage with a highway and railway line through the corridor, so that East Prussia would have a direct connection to the Reich.

Colonel Beck had declared that such a solution seemed acceptable to him." Ribbentrop's visit to Warsaw on January 26th also concluded with a joint

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final communiqué, which gave the impression that the door to a negotiated German-Polish solution for Danzig remained open. From his perspective, Hitler assumed that with the two minimal demands of "Danzig and transport links," the renunciation of the formerly predominantly German Pomerelia, and border adjustments in Upper Silesia, he was accommodating the Poles to such an extent that they could not permanently refuse him. In return, he also offered the aforementioned guarantee of the borders and the extension of the non-aggression pact for 25 years. Hitler also knew that no postwar chancellor before him had made such a significant concession. In this respect, and clearly towards Poland, he sees himself as a man of peace.

But then, in March 1939, came Hitler's original sin with Czechoslovakia. The Polish government swiftly seized the opportunity to switch sides and secure a guarantee from the British and French against Germany.

Hitler apparently fails to recognize that he himself opened the door for Warsaw to switch sides. Disappointed, he gradually alters his approach towards Poland. Hitler now prepares to resolve the Danzig question, if not through negotiations, then by force. It remains unclear, however, when Hitler truly intends war with Poland, and whether he might still hope for a concession from the Polish government until the very end.

Many historians maintain that Hitler deliberately pursued the war against Poland from the beginning of his rule, but at the latest from the beginning of 1939. They cite as evidence the fact that he ordered the Wehrmacht to take over Poland on April 3rd.

¹⁴⁸ A fait accompli

¹⁴⁹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 185

¹⁵⁰ François-Poncet, page 192

in 1939 commissioned the drafting of a campaign plan against Poland.¹⁵¹

And they infer from Hitler's so-called key speeches of May 23 and August 22, 1939, that this was his firm intention: war, and not just Danzig's return to the Reich. A great deal speaks against this opinion.

On March 25, 1939, while Lipski was in Warsaw with the renewed German offer of negotiations, while Poland was securing a new guarantee of protection from England, while Hitler was still unaware that the door to German-Polish understanding via Danzig was being slammed shut, on this March 25 he issued a new directive to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Colonel General von Brauchitsch, regarding the conduct towards Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Slovakia.¹⁵² Regarding Poland, there

As can be read:

"The Danzig Question: Lipski returns from Warsaw on Sunday, March 26. He had been tasked with inquiring whether Poland was prepared to reach an arrangement regarding Danzig. ... The Führer, however, does not want to resolve the Danzig Question by force. He does not want to drive Poland into England's arms. ..."

Polish Question: For the time being, the Führer does not intend to resolve the Polish question. However, it will now be addressed. ..."

It is further stated that a later attack against Poland would have to have favorable political conditions.

From the same day, March 25, 1939, the files of the German Foreign Office contain another note showing that Hitler was still leaning towards a soft solution. It states, as a "directive from the Führer":

"The Führer, however, does not want to resolve the Danzig question by force. He does not want to drive Poland into England's arms. A possible military occupation of Danzig would only be considered if Lipski indicates that the Polish government cannot justify a voluntary surrender of Danzig to its people, and that the solution through a unanimous agreement is unacceptable. "

would make it easier."

The Chancellor had expressed himself in almost the same way to Colonel General von Brauchitsch six months earlier.¹⁵⁴ The text of Hitler's directive of the 25th

The events of March 1939 and the entry in the Foreign Office files cast doubt on the notion that the eventual conquest of Poland was already the Führer's absolute goal at that time. However, he certainly considered it as a possibility in the event of a massive provocation by Poland, which even then could not be ruled out. Hitler had not forgotten Poland's war explorations in France in 1933.

¹⁵¹ OKW, Directive "Case White" of April 3, 1939, see dtv – Hitler's Directives, pages 19ff IMT

¹⁵² Documents Volume XXXVIII, page 247 – The parenthetical additions are by the author.

¹⁵³ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 99

¹⁵⁴ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, Page 185

On March 26, Adolf Hitler learned of the Anglo-Polish agreement and Poland's rejection of the Danzig question. If he had wanted war at any cost, he could have found ample grounds to commit to an attack against Poland in his next directive to the Wehrmacht leadership. These grounds included the partial mobilization of the Polish army on March 23 (not provoked by Germany), the simultaneous troop buildup towards Danzig, and the increasing attacks against members of the German minority in Poland since the beginning of the year. Instead, with his directive of April 3, 1939, Hitler, in response to "Case White," ordered the development of an attack plan against Poland so that an attack could be launched as early as September 1, 1939. He left open the question of whether this would actually happen. Rather, Hitler tells the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, following the issuance of this directive, that he does not want a conflict with Poland and that he has no interest in weakening Poland and thus supporting the independence aspirations of the Ukrainians.¹⁵⁵

The text of the directive is revealing in many ways:

"Directive 'Case White' April 3, 1939

I. Poland's current stance requires that, beyond the already addressed border security measures in the east, military preparations be made to eliminate any threat from this side for the foreseeable future.

1. Political prerequisites and objectives:

Germany's relationship with Poland remains governed by the principle of avoiding conflict. Should Poland alter its hitherto principled policy toward Germany and adopt a stance threatening the Reich, a final reckoning may become necessary. ... The political leadership sees it as its duty in this case to isolate Poland if possible, that is, to limit the war to Poland. ...

2. Military demands:

The major goals in building up the German Wehrmacht continue to be determined by the opposition of the Western democracies. The "Case White" merely constitutes a precautionary addition to the preparations, but is by no means to be regarded as a prerequisite for a military confrontation with the Western adversaries.

3. Task of the Wehrmacht:

The task of the Wehrmacht is to destroy the Polish Wehrmacht...
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The wording shows that this is a "precautionary instruction" in case...
Poland reacts to Danzig's return against its will with a declaration of war

¹⁵⁵ Miksche, page 69

¹⁵⁶ dtv – Hitler's Instructions, pages 19 ff

Polish Ambassador Lipski had already issued this threat to German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop "in his official capacity" a good week earlier.

Attack plans and orders prepared in advance were quite common in Europe during the 1920s and 30s, as demonstrated by the famous Foch Plan for the French and Polish attack on Germany. The directive for Case White also shows that Hitler's long-term vision for the deployment of the Wehrmacht did not extend to Poland. The Wehrmacht's rearmament remained focused on the confrontation with the two colonial powers in the West, a conflict Hitler had "foreseen."

After Hitler issued the directive for "Case White," he nevertheless made his offer to the Polish government once again on April 28, 1939: *"1. Danzig returns as a Free State to the framework of the German*

Reich."
back.

2. The corridor provides Germany with a road and a railway line for its own use.

Germany is ready for this:

3. to recognize all of Poland's economic rights in Gdansk;

4. To ensure that Poland has a free port of any size in Gdansk with completely free access;

*5. so that the borders between Germany and Poland are finally considered to be-
to give, to accept and to take, and*

6. to conclude a twenty-five-year non-aggression pact with Poland-

*"Close." This*¹⁵⁷

offer also didn't help Hitler one bit. What followed was his so-called key speech of May 23rd before the commanders-in-chief of the Wehrmacht.

parts.¹⁵⁸ Even this speech to the generals, often cited as proof, does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Hitler had already firmly planned to invade Poland in September at the end of May 1939. Sentences such as the following are repeatedly taken from the speech:

"Therefore, the question of sparing Poland is moot, and the decision remains to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity." And "Danzig is not the object at stake. For us, it is about expanding our living space in the east."

as evidence of Hitler's firm will to attack Poland. But the overall context of the speech reveals something different. Hitler summoned the commanders-in-chief and chiefs of staff of the Wehrmacht branches to him to propose the establishment of an independent study staff at the High Command.

¹⁵⁷ Domarus, Volume II, summary of page 1162;

¹⁵⁸ Domarus, Volume II, pages 1196 ff.

to announce the establishment of the Wehrmacht's High Command (OKW). He knows that this new competing enterprise will meet with little enthusiasm from the general staffs of the various branches of the Wehrmacht. Hitler therefore explains the necessity of such a staff by referring to the requirements of modern warfare in the future. To justify this, he presents his thoughts on possible wars in Europe.

The primary focus is on Germany's position vis-à-vis its adversaries England, France, and the Soviet Union. Poland plays a role in Hitler's argument only as a British satellite, operating behind Germany's back. Excerpts from the speech include:

"The Pole is not an additional enemy. Poland will always stand on the side of our enemies."

"The aim remains to deliver a decisive blow, or even a crushing one, to the enemy (meaning England 159) at the outset. ... This is only possible if one does not slide into a war with England through Poland."

Rather, these statements indicate that Poland was not yet the focus of Hitler's considerations in May 1939. These sentences are a reaction to Poland's change of sides two months before this speech. The address of May 23rd is aggressive, but it deals with a later confrontation with England, when it comes to reclaiming one of the lost colonies from the British or claiming a replacement in Ukraine. The purpose of this speech is the new study staff at the OKW (High Command of the Armed Forces). The main reason for establishing this staff is a future confrontation with England, which Hitler fears. Despite the drastic language used, Poland is not the point of contention. However, Poland is now—and this is new—on Hitler's "hit list." At the end of the speech, Hitler states that the Wehrmacht must be prepared for war by 1943 to 1944. There is no mention of Poland or 1939.

If Hitler's May speech demonstrates anything regarding Poland, it is his realization that his policy of cooperation has failed. From now on, Poland is no longer a potential partner for him, but a potential enemy.

Until the summer of 1939, Hitler had neither publicly nor through diplomatic channels threatened war. Up to that point, only his demand for negotiations regarding Danzig and the connections via the corridor had been raised.

Alongside the Danzig question, a completely different German-Polish problem arose in 1939, one that stirred up considerable anger in the German public. Throughout the year, the situation of the German and Ukrainian minorities in Poland deteriorated, a situation that was already far from satisfactory. State Secretary von Weizsäcker, then Deputy Foreign Minister in Berlin, wrote the following about it:

¹⁵⁹ Author's note

"Our diplomatic and consular reports from Poland showed how, in 1939, the tide kept rising and overshadowed the original problem: Danzig and passage through the corridor." In the summer, tensions between the Reich and Poland escalated¹⁶⁰

with increasing speed and drama.¹⁶¹ A series of incidents and exchanges of fire occurred at the borders. Outbreaks of violence against members of minority groups were now commonplace. In Galicia, a wave of arrests targeted Ukrainians. Thousands of "disloyal and enemies of the state" Germans were transported to the interior of Poland and concentrated in camps. Polish companies laid off workers of German mother tongue en masse. Young Germans could not find employment. A large number of German firms were forced to close by order of the authorities. German shops were boycotted in many cities. Even Polish soldiers stood armed in front of the shops as boycott posts. In Upper Silesia, Poland closed the local border traffic, and tens of thousands of German commuters were

Cut off from their workplaces. To make matters worse, Polish naval and coastal artillery shelled Lufthansa passenger planes over the open sea on three occasions. Adding to the tension was the growing nervousness of the population in Gdansk. The demonstrations by Gdansk residents for their reunification with Germany seemed endless. In July and August, a wave of ethnic German refugees began arriving in Germany, intensifying daily, much like the situation in Berlin shortly before the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. By August 17th, over 76,000 refugees were counted at the Polish-German borders, with another 18,000 within Gdansk's borders. The situation became so volatile that the Gdansk question and the problem of the minorities could no longer be postponed.

In Poland, too, there is deep resentment towards Germany and the German-speaking population within the country. The Reich is increasingly dealing directly with the Danzig authorities – instead of following the diplomatic channels through the Polish Foreign Ministry in Warsaw, as required by the Danzig Statute.

The German minority – just like the Ukrainian minority – is also accused of being disloyal to Poland and an enemy in their own country.

After five unsuccessful attempts at negotiation by the German side in the autumn, winter, and spring of 1938/39, Hitler apparently decided in late spring 1939 to resolve the complex of German-Polish problems, if necessary, through war. Hitler knew that a campaign could not begin too late in the year due to the typical autumn weather in Eastern Europe. Rain, mud, and fog would otherwise hinder the movements of ground troops and, in all likelihood, preclude the use of air forces.

¹⁶⁰ v. Weizsäcker Memoirs, page 242.

¹⁶¹ The following is taken from the Stader Tageblatt July-August 1939 and from the documents on the prehistory of the war from AA 1939 No. 2, documents 349 to 437.

When Hitler spoke of the possibility of war, he always targeted the end of August or the beginning of September. On August 12, Hitler announced to the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, that he would attack Poland after the next provocation. When Ciano inquired further, Hitler's answer was: "End of August."¹⁶² What still prevented him until August was the attempt by the British and French to bind the Soviets into an alliance against Germany. With the Soviet Union on the opposing side, Hitler, by his own admission, would not have dared to strike against Poland.¹⁶³ But when the Soviets shifted their allegiance to Germany around August 20, and when Hitler and von Ribbentrop succeeded in concluding a non-aggression pact with Stalin and Molotov on August 23, the date for an attack against Poland was also fixed for Hitler, should Warsaw remain inflexible on the Danzig question.

On August 22, 1939, he gathered the army group and army commanders of the three branches of the Wehrmacht at the Obersalzberg and announced his intention. The speech he gives on this occasion is his aforementioned third so-called key speech. He states, in essence, that he had originally anticipated a war against the Western powers. Now, however, he "must first turn his attention to Poland." The speech is recorded verbatim as follows:

"Relations with Poland have become untenable. My proposals to Poland regarding Gdansk and the corridor were disrupted by British intervention. Poland changed its tone towards us. The state of tension is intolerable in the long run. ... Now is a more favorable time than in two or three years."

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Hitler also mentions that he had already made the decision to attack in the spring of 1939. If he is telling the truth here, this was after Poland's shift to the British and French side.

In the final days before the outbreak of war, Hitler's stance became increasingly wavering. He sometimes declared that he was now committed to war, and at other times that he still hoped for the Polish government to back down. For example, on the morning of August 24, he confided to State Secretary von Weizsäcker in private that he believed England would ultimately abandon Poland and grant Warsaw his demands.¹⁶⁵ After the Soviets switched sides to support Germany, this hope was no longer entirely unfounded.

Hitler was obsessed with success and clearly not necessarily with war. In his eyes, success would also have meant resolving the Danzig question and the transit problem solely through the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and the threat of deploying 52 army divisions.

¹⁶² Domarus, Volume II, page

¹⁶³ 1226; v. Weizsäcker Papers,

¹⁶⁴ page 181;

¹⁶⁵ Jacobsen, page 99; v. Weizsäcker Memoirs, page 253

to resolve the situation without waging war. This solution would have continued his series of previous successes in a way that was advantageous to him domestically. Up to this point, Adolf Hitler had repeatedly boasted of having achieved the occupation of the Rhineland, the return of the Sudetenland, Austria, and the Memel Territory, and even the annexation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, without war or bloodshed.

Even in the last four days before the Wehrmacht launched its attack on Poland, Hitler did not withdraw his offer of "Danzig for peace." Initially, it was still the old offer: Danzig and transit routes in exchange for recognition of Poland's territorial gains from 1920 to 1923 at Germany's expense. On August 30, Hitler raised the price for Poland. In the aforementioned final offer, which the Polish representative refused, Hitler demanded not only Danzig and the transit routes but also a plebiscite in West Prussia-Pomerania. According to Hitler's new proposal, the majority of the population there would decide whether the territory would return to Germany or remain Polish. This proposal, based on the now internationally recognized principle of the right of peoples to self-determination, was still moderate. Finally, Hitler pressed Poland to give what it had refused to negotiate for a year. Hitler wanted Danzig or war, and Poland chose war.

After the war, it was argued that Hitler's final offer of negotiations, demanding a plebiscite in West Prussia-Pomerania, was merely a pretense of a nonexistent intention. It was claimed that in the final days before the war, he was no longer seriously seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict, but rather wanted war with Poland at any cost. The last compromise proposal to Poland makes this assumption highly improbable. If Hitler had wanted war at any price, he would have raised his demands on Poland so high that even England could no longer have advised the Poles to negotiate. Above all, he would not have allowed German-Polish and German-British negotiations to continue until the afternoon before the outbreak of war.

Even from the time of the campaign against Poland, there is evidence that Hitler, while accepting the war with its high risk, had not fully factored it in. Lieutenant Colonel von Vormann, army liaison officer in Hitler's entourage, describes his nightly monologues in which he tried to clarify his next steps for himself in a small circle.

Von Vormann reports from his time in Poland:

"Hitler often spoke for many hours about the future structure of the Polish state. He was by no means clear about what he actually wanted. He also failed to reach any decision."

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¹⁶⁶ v. Vormann, page 14

Hitler's perplexity at this time suggests that he hadn't actually factored Poland into his calculations in the autumn of 1939. Otherwise, he and his advisors would have long since had a plan for a defeated Poland ready.

The sequence of Hitler's actions and reactions in the year before the outbreak of war suggests—despite all his bellicose rhetoric—that the dictator only resorted to the "great Polish solution" after the failure of a "small Danzig solution." The long path from the initial negotiation proposal, through the preparation of a coup in Danzig, through further negotiation proposals, through the preparation of a contingency plan for war against Poland, through pressing demands on the Polish government, through the request to England for help in the Danzig and transit issues, to the attack against Poland, does not support the conclusion that Hitler intended to conquer and dismember Poland from the outset.

Adolf Hitler ruined his own chances of diplomatically reclaiming Danzig when, contrary to his promise, he ordered the occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1939 and declared it a protectorate. He evidently never admitted this strategic, political, and moral error to himself. Instead, he saw himself as a victim of the Poles' infamy, who first seized Oderberg and Teschen and then, instead of giving anything back, defected to the enemy. Without that capital blunder in Czechoslovakia, and with more patience, Hitler could certainly have resolved the Danzig question and the transit problem successfully without war, because Poland's position on this issue was historically, ethnographically, and legally very weak. Hitler's stance toward Poland would not necessarily have led to war with Poland. Ultimately, however, it was clearly no longer primarily the Danzig question that drove Hitler to act with undue haste. It was the mounting pressure within Poland's minority community that caused the situation to escalate. The summer of 1939 bears a striking resemblance to the spring of 1999. The treatment of Germans and Ukrainians in the multi-ethnic state of Poland stirred up emotions in Germany in 1939 just as the Serb repression of Albanians in the multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia outraged people in Europe 60 years later. The worsening situation of the German minority and the Poles' refusal to continue negotiations over Danzig drove Hitler to a wrong and fatal solution in August 1939. He triggered the Second World War.

Roosevelt's role in the Danzig dispute

At the turn of the year 1938/39, German-Polish talks were still ongoing. Both the French and the British at that time showed virtually no inclination to wage another war for the benefit of Poland and the detriment of Germany. For one thing, they were only just relieved to have ended the German-Czech-

The Czech dispute over the Sudetenland had been peacefully settled. On the other hand, in October 1938, the Poles, against the express wishes of the British and French, had invaded Czechoslovakia and seized the West Teschen industrial region. In stark contrast to this sentiment, the impression arises that Roosevelt is keen to drag Europe into war despite the Sudetenland settlement that has just been reached.

William Bullitt, Roosevelt's ambassador and personal confidant in Paris, conveyed this impression when he explained his assessment of the further development of the Danzig Affair to Professor Burckhardt, the League of Nations High Commissioner for Danzig, on December 2, 1938. Burckhardt recorded the conversation in his diary: *"He explained to me with curious satisfaction that the Poles were prepared to go to war over*

Danzig. ... In April the new war will break out. Never since the torpedoing of the Lusitania has there been such religious hatred of Germany in America as there is today."

Chamberlain and Daladier will be blown away by public opinion. This is a holy war. ..." Behind Bullitt's words were actions. On January 4, 1939, Roosevelt ordered the entire US ¹⁶⁸

fleet to sail from the Pacific through the Panama Canal to the Atlantic side for maneuvers in the Caribbean. On the same day, he requested an additional \$1.3 billion in armaments funding from Congress and—in a clear signal at the time—he called on members of Congress to repeal or relax the American neutrality laws.¹⁶⁹ The latter was denied. The armaments funding, the fleet at the entrance to the Atlantic, and the attempt to cast off the shackles of the neutrality laws were three signals to Germany, Poland, Great Britain, and France. Roosevelt left no doubt that he was determined to prevent any further dismantling of the postwar Versailles order, that he disapproved of the annexation of Danzig by the German Reich, and that he would intervene against Germany in the event of a war over Danzig.

The three threatening gestures of January 4, 1939, certainly had an impact on the ongoing German-Polish talks, which were scheduled to enter their third round on January 5. As recently as October 1938, the Poles had seized West Teschen with Hitler's approval. He could then initially expect a certain degree of cooperation from the Polish government regarding the Danzig question. The first German-Polish negotiations in October and November 1938, as previously reported, had been inconclusive, but the path to further negotiations remained open. On the day before the third German attempt to resolve the issues surrounding Danzig and the Polish Corridor, on that January 4th, the Polish government demonstrated its willingness to compromise.

¹⁶⁷ The torpedoing of the Lusitania, which was carrying ammunition for England in addition to passengers, by a German submarine contributes to the American declaration of war on Germany in 1917.

¹⁶⁸ Burckhardt, page 225

¹⁶⁹ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's War, page 375

Roosevelt told the Poles that Germany could expect a powerful adversary.

In February 1939, Roosevelt also succeeded in undermining the ongoing Anglo-German trade negotiations with his own offer, which ruled out a German-British treaty. The American president thus hindered a rapprochement between London and Berlin and also damaged the German economy. Roosevelt's forceful and unequivocal stance around the turn of the year 1938/39 did not fail to have the desired effect on the Poles' resolve against Germany and on the British courage towards Germany.

On March 15, German troops invaded the remainder of Czechoslovakia, marking Hitler's first clear breach of the peace. From then on, Roosevelt tightened his net around Germany. The first of his many steps, the raising of all tariffs on goods from the German Reich, has already been mentioned. On the 19th, the British Foreign Office asked the American Foreign Office to continue naval cooperation between the two countries and to relocate the US Navy to Hawaii in the Pacific. On the 23rd, Roosevelt agreed to both requests, thus freeing up the British Pacific Fleet for deployment in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. As a further step, on the 20th, the President introduced a bill to revise the neutrality laws in Congress. On the same day, Britain made its first offer to Poland to guarantee its security. When negotiations regarding the nature of the guarantee stalled, Roosevelt influenced Chamberlain's decisions. On the 26th, the president sent the American ambassador, Kennedy, to London to see Chamberlain and had him point out the danger that an inadequate British guarantee for Poland and for peace would pose.¹⁷⁰ Roosevelt, whose Congress still prevented him from intervening directly, sent Chamberlain and England ahead. The British prime minister assured the American ambassador that England would stand by Poland and defend it should Hitler start a war over Danzig. Five days later, on March 31, Chamberlain issued the guarantee for Poland.

As an observer of the scene from the other side of the Atlantic, the German chargé d'affaires at the embassy in Washington, Hans Thomsen, reported on the 27th.

March to Minister von Ribbentrop in Berlin: *"The*

demonstrations and measures of the American government in recent weeks make it increasingly clear that President Roosevelt's claim to leadership in world political affairs culminates in the goal of destroying National Socialist Germany by all available means. ... Roosevelt is deeply convinced that Germany is the enemy that must be destroyed because it threatens the balance of power and the status quo of-

¹⁷⁰ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's Road to War, page 529

*...has been so sensitively disturbed that America will feel the consequences if it fails to play the preventer.*¹⁷¹ ...“ On April 14, Roosevelt¹⁷²

writes the aforementioned letters to Hitler and Mussolini, demanding guarantees for 31 specifically named states. On the 19th

In April, even before Hitler had responded to his demand for guarantees for the 31 states, ¹⁷³ the President informed the British government that he considered it essential for England to introduce universal conscription. On April 28, the corresponding bill was passed in the House of Commons. The French also received indications that America would stand by them in the event of conflict with Germany or Japan. On April 15, the American naval attaché informed the French naval command in Paris that Roosevelt could order the American navy to the Irish Sea or the Philippines without consulting Congress if there were any intelligence about the Axis powers' plans for war.¹⁷⁴ In this indirect way, France was also offered support against Germany in the Atlantic or against Japan off the coast of French Indochina.

At the end of June 1939, Roosevelt's bid to end the war failed in Congress, which was unwilling to lift the arms embargo against belligerent nations or to weaken the neutrality laws. The president thus remained obligated to keep the United States out of a war between European nations. Nevertheless, the president's position was clear and firm. He rejected the authoritarian regimes in Japan, Germany, and Italy. He saw the rise of these three countries as a major threat to the moral, economic, and naval leadership he claimed for America. Regarding Germany, Roosevelt maintained that the status of Danzig as a League of Nations mandate, the separation of East Prussia from the Reich via the Polish Corridor, and the extension of Poland to include the predominantly German-populated parts of West Prussia constituted the just and lasting solution established at Versailles. He thus encouraged Poland, Britain, and France not to concede to Germany's demands.

The relationship between the Soviet Union and Germany

Another participant in the "great game" for Danzig from the spring of 1933 onward was the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's relationship with Germany was constantly shifting, sometimes tactically driven by immediate necessities and sometimes strategically driven by Moscow's long-term goals. Thus, after 1918, Soviet Russia was initially seen as a Bolshevik state, a pariah state in the world, and

¹⁷¹ Prevent = Anticipate

¹⁷² ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, pages 107 f

¹⁷³ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's Road to War, page 573

¹⁷⁴ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's Road to War, page 572

Like the defeated Germany, they were confronted with the situation. Consequently, in 1922, both pariah states concluded the Treaty of Rapallo to break their isolation, from which they both suffered, and to provide each other with economic assistance. This was followed in 1926 by the Treaty of Berlin, a neutrality treaty for a period of five years. The two agreements of Rapallo and Berlin allowed, among other things, the cooperation between the Soviet Army and the Reichswehr already described, which opened up training and testing opportunities for the German military and allowed the Russians to learn from them. However, the tactical advantages for both sides could not mask the fundamental differences between the systems. For the Bolsheviks, Germany was a "capitalist" country like England or France and, as such, a state in the opposing camp. In 1920, Lenin defined the Soviet Union's strategic relationship to these states, and Stalin would adhere to this in 1939. On December 6, 1920, in a keynote address to high-ranking officials of the Moscow Organization of the Communist Party of Russia/the Bolsheviks, Lenin stated: *"Until the final victory of socialism throughout the world," the fundamental rule applies, "that one must exploit the contradictions and antagonisms between two imperialist power groups, between two capitalist groups of states, and incite them against*

each other." If it is impossible to defeat both, "one must understand how to group one's forces so that the two become quarreling amongst themselves. ... But as soon as we are strong enough to overthrow all of capitalism, we will immediately seize it by the throat."

Thus, for Lenin, Germany, as a "capitalist and imperialist" state, was fundamentally on the opposing side, despite all economic and military cooperation. Stalin would take this into account in the summer of 1939 when he attempted to lure first the British and French, and then the Germans, into a war against each other.

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Poland's reinsurance with France is about to Beginning of war

Paris never severed its ties to Warsaw. Even during von Ribbentrop's visit to Poland in January 1939, when he attempted to negotiate regarding Danzig, Prime Minister Daladier and Foreign Minister Bonnet, in their aforementioned speeches to the National Assembly, encouraged the Polish government to "categorically reject the demands of certain neighbors."

The French relationship with the Poles, which had cooled somewhat, warmed again from the spring of 1939 onwards. On March 16, 1939, Hitler broke off relations – as mentioned –

¹⁷⁵ Topitsch, pages 39 ff., there quoted from Lenin, Works, Volume 31, Berlin (East) 1964, page 434 424

his Munich promise and turns the rest of Czechia into a protectorate. This gives the Poles, Britons and French reason to fear that the German Reich government will also take over Danzig in the near future. Poland, which had repeatedly declared that the annexation of Danzig would be tantamount to a declaration of war, now refused to withdraw from this agreement and asked England and France for a guarantee for itself. On March 25, 1939, London gave its promise. On March 31, Paris also issued the requested guarantee to Warsaw. On May 15, the Polish Minister of War, General Kasprzycki, traveled to Paris to discuss with his French comrade, General Gamelin, how France would support Poland in a potential war. The general outcome of the talks was a mutual promise to act jointly against Germany in the event of war. Poland indicated its intention to inflict the greatest possible losses on the German Wehrmacht and not to surrender before the start of the Franco-British operations in the west. As soon as the Wehrmacht itself was weakened—according to the Poles—East Prussia would be attacked.¹⁷⁶

The Frenchman Gamelin, for his part, promised air raids against Germany in the first days of the war, limited army operations from the third day onward, and a French offensive with 40 army divisions from the 15th day of general mobilization in France.¹⁷⁷ On May 19, the meeting between the two war ministers ended with a written agreement obligating the French army to launch an offensive against Germany from the 15th day onward.¹⁷⁸ The French text reads "avec les gros de ses forces," which Gamelin, after Poland's defeat, interpreted as "with about one-third of its forces."¹⁷⁹ The Polish text reads "swymi głównymi siłami," which translates as "with the main forces." For Germany, it is significant that the French promise of an attack against Germany also applies if Poland is not attacked, but only the city of Danzig is annexed by Germany.¹⁸⁰

On May 31, 1939, two weeks after the Franco-Polish War Ministers' Conference, from which the Poles had received such far-reaching promises, General Gamelin wrote the guidelines for the future commander-in-chief of the French front on the Rhine and Moselle.¹⁸¹ In this directive, there was no longer any mention of offensives against Germany. It stated:

¹⁷⁶ Roos, Planning Poland, page 198

¹⁷⁷ Rassinier, page 266

¹⁷⁸ Piekalkiewicz, page 45; similarly Deighton, page 105; similarly Roos, Planning Poland, page 199

¹⁷⁹ Gamelin, Volume II, page 421 and Roos, Planning Poland, pages 198 f

¹⁸⁰ Piekalkiewicz, page 45

¹⁸¹ From "Guidelines of the Chief of the General Staff for the future Commander-in-Chief of the North-Eastern Theater of War on possible operations between the Rhine and Moselle", see Gamelin, Servir Volume II, pages 426 f, the parenthetical notes are by the author.

"This commitment itself will have two phases:

a. The first phase will involve possibly driving the enemy back from national (meaning: French) territory; then working our way towards his (meaning: German) line of resistance. ...

b. In a second phase, ..., the aim would be to explore those sections of the German position on which all efforts can then be concentrated by using our available resources."

Gamelin thus reveals that he had not intended, even in May 1939, to relieve Poland of a major military attack in a war with Germany. His promise to this effect to the Polish War Minister Kasprzycki was therefore merely a lure for the Poles to risk the war over Danzig.

On August 23, 1939, the day the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed, the French cabinet took stock of its finances to determine whether it could fulfill its alliance obligations to Poland without Russia's help. The minutes of the meeting reveal the thoughts of the French Chief of the General Staff, General Gamelin, a week before the "collective defense" with Poland.¹⁸² The French commander-in-chief must have known at that time that the German army had a total of 106 active and reserve divisions, while Poland had a total of 52. He also knew that the Polish air force was inferior to the German one. Nevertheless, Gamelin presented the assembled ministers with this calculation: *"France can oppose 200 German divisions with approximately 120 of its own. Therefore, it must retain the support of the 80 Polish divisions. ... The Polish army will offer honorable resistance to the Germans. Cold and*

bad weather will quickly bring hostilities to a halt, so that the battle will continue in the east into the spring of 1940. At that point, the French army will be reinforced by numerous British divisions landing on the continent. ... In the spring of 1940, France will therefore be able to count on 240 divisions, comprising the 120 French, 80 Polish, and approximately 40 British divisions."

Furthermore, if Germany were to violate Dutch and Belgian neutrality, it would thereby bring an additional 30 Dutch and Belgian divisions to our side, bringing the total to 270 Allied divisions against 200 German divisions." This calculation by Gamelin reveals three unflattering facts for France. Firstly, the minister thereby admits that the French

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¹⁸² Protocol of General Decamps of August 23, 1939, Bonnet, page 266

¹⁸³ Bonnet, pages 265 f

The French army only intended to come to the aid of the Polish army in the spring of 1940, and not – as General Kasprzycki had promised in May 1939 – after just 15 days. Secondly, Gamelin reveals here that his aim in the May agreement was to commit 80 Polish divisions to a future war between France and Germany. At the time of the French promise to come to the aid of the Polish army on May 19th...

In May, there had been no German threat against Poland, and therefore no legitimate reason for France to wage war against Germany. Thirdly, it becomes clear that Gamelin informed his ministerial colleagues in Paris even before the war that such an early relief offensive to aid Poland—as promised—was not actually planned. It would now have been the duty of Bonnet, the Foreign Minister, to warn his Polish counterpart, Beck, against taking too hard a stance toward Germany's demand for Danzig. Instead, Gamelin lulled the Poles into a false sense of security with the promise of a two-front war against Germany, so that

Bonnet lets them – although he knows better – languish in their false belief, and that both of them let the Poles run headlong into their doom with their eyes wide open.

In 1939, France used the Poles for its own national interests.

Paris sees another war as an opportunity to reduce Germany once again to the level of Versailles and to punish it for the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

The French government is urging Poland to remain stubborn on the Danzig question, well aware that this will lead to war. In the cabinet meeting of August 23, Gamelin also presents his preferred scenario. He anticipates a Europe-wide war with France and Poland on one side, followed by Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany on the other. France is deliberately banking on war in the summer of 1939.

On September 1, 1939, the Wehrmacht attacked Poland. On September 3, Paris declared war on Berlin. France broke its promise, launched no offensive against Germany, and allowed the Poles to perish. Gamelin later attempted to explain this in his memoirs by claiming that the Poles had mistranslated the military agreement of May 19, 1939. He stated that he had never promised to attack Germany with the main force of France.¹⁸⁴

Poland's reinsurance with England is close to Beginning of war

As late as October 1938, British-Polish relations were frozen. Poland had annexed Teschen against England's wishes. But with Hitler's coup in Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Poland suddenly moved back into the center of British interest. When Hitler had the rest of Czechoslovakia occupied, thus securing his

¹⁸⁴ Gamelin, Volume II, page 421

The Munich promises were broken, and in London, Moscow, and Paris, there were fears that the German dictator harbored ambitions extending beyond the mere return of Danzig. London was well aware that after Danzig's return, the colonies that Great Britain had seized from Germany in 1919 would eventually be next in line. England therefore wanted to put a stop to the further course of revisions in good time, and the German dispute with Poland over the Free City of Danzig suited this purpose. Thus, England immediately placed its hopes on Poland. The Polish misdeed in Teschen was thereby forgiven without further comment. On March 20, four days after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, London offered Warsaw a protection treaty against Germany and proposed including France and the Soviet Union as additional guarantor powers.¹⁸⁵ For Warsaw, this was a godsend in further repelling all German demands for Danzig. However, Poland wanted to avoid the Soviet Union becoming its own protecting power in this way and endeavored to keep the Russians out. The Polish government therefore requested a bilateral protection agreement against Germany from the British.¹⁸⁶ It argued that negotiations to conclude a quadratic alliance would take too long, and that

France has been guaranteeing the security of the Polish state since 1921 anyway.

The British would certainly have been happy to share responsibility for Poland's security with the Soviet Union, but a completely different event, a political rumor in London, brings momentum and haste to the talks with the Poles.

At the same time as the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, a Romanian delegation is negotiating in London to obtain British state loans for Romania.

The head of the delegation, the diplomat Tilea, exploited the English concern over the fate of Czechoslovakia to redirect their worries to Romania. He claimed that Germany was about to invade Romania as well. However implausible this was, given the 400-kilometer distance between Germany and Romania, the Romanian struck a nerve with the British. At the time, the majority of shares in the Romanian oil fields were British-owned. This Romanian rumor stirred up the English public. London, Paris, and New York newspapers carried the false news of the German attack on Romania around the world within a day. The rumor had its effect, even though it was officially denied the very next day, March 18, by the Romanian Foreign Minister, Gafencu.¹⁸⁷ While England was still trying to win over France, the Soviet Union, and Poland to a four-way alliance against Germany, Warsaw capitalized on the atmosphere created by the Romanian rumor. Polish Foreign Minister Beck urges his English counterpart Lord Halifax "given the rapid progress

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum from the British Foreign Office to the Polish Government of 20 March 1939, see Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume IV, pages 400 ff.

¹⁸⁶ Inquiry of March 23, 1939, see White Book of the Polish Government, Document No. 66, pages 93

¹⁸⁷ ff. Rassiniér, pages 232 ff.

Given the events, the British government should refrain from time-consuming negotiations and immediately conclude a British-Polish protection agreement. Foreign Minister Halifax, who by now knows that the Romania rumor is untrue and that there is no German threat against Poland, agrees. On the 31st...

In March 1939, Lord Halifax issued a guarantee declaration for Poland before the House of Commons in London.¹⁸⁸

The intriguing aspect of this British patronage of Poland is that it stemmed from resentment over Hitler's treatment of Czechoslovakia. What London failed to grasp was that just six months earlier, Poland itself had attempted to partition Czechoslovakia by force. On October 24, 1938, Beck had asked Hitler whether the eastern part of Czechoslovakia, the so-called Carpathian Ruthenia, could be separated and annexed by Hungary.¹⁸⁹ Poland and Hungary were allies at the time. Hitler disagreed in October 1938. Thus, Great Britain henceforth "protected" Poland because Germany had plundered Czechoslovakia, whereas Poland had previously been prevented from doing the same due to Germany's veto.

On April 3, 1939, the Polish Foreign Minister traveled to London to receive the British guarantee of March 31 in writing and to supplement it with a Polish one. Both sides now pledged to assist each other in the event of a direct or indirect threat from other states.¹⁹⁰ The precise scope of the assistance and aid was reserved for a later "permanent agreement." This agreement, however, was not concluded until August 25.

On April 7, 1939, a completely different event stirred emotions in Europe and the USA: Italy attacked Albania. On April 13, France and England responded with a joint guarantee for the independence of Greece and Romania. On April 15, US President Roosevelt followed with the aforementioned telegram to the German and Italian governments. He demanded assurances from both that they would not attack 31 specifically named states in Europe.¹⁹¹

From April 24 to May 4, delegations from the general staffs of France and England met for a conference in London. The stated topic was the guarantee for Poland, but the discussions focused almost exclusively on Anglo-French cooperation in the event of war. The debates and agreements centered primarily on sea lanes, colonies in North Africa and the Far East, and bases from Gibraltar to Singapore.¹⁹² Poland was just one piece of the puzzle.

¹⁸⁸ British War Bluebook, Document 17

¹⁸⁹ Roos, Poland and Europe, pages 383 f

¹⁹⁰ English-Polish communiqué on the meeting of Polish Foreign Minister Beck in

London, 6 April 1939, see Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume V, pages 35 f; ADAP,

¹⁹¹ Series D, Volume VI, Document No. 200

¹⁹² Minutes of General Lelong of May 5, 1939, AA 1939/41, No. 6, Document 1

A mosaic of the two great powers. The British General Staff indicated its intention to send six infantry divisions to France within the first six weeks of war, along with ten territorial divisions in six months and a further sixteen in the first year. In total, this amounted to 32 divisions to support France against Germany, not 40 as General Gamelin later reported to the French Cabinet. The deployment of the British fleet was only considered in the context of a war against Japan and Italy. There was no mention of direct British aid for Poland. For England, the spring of 1939 was clearly about preparing for a global confrontation with its rivals. The guarantee for Poland from London was clearly a political signal intended to keep Germany away from Danzig and Poland. As the Franco-British talks revealed, it was not an offer of immediate, on-the-ground intervention on Poland's behalf.

This flood of guarantees is not only a warning, it is also a temptation.

While Germany and Italy must now expect that none of their further acts of violence will go unanswered, the protection afforded to Poland tempts the Poles to adopt an uncompromising stance towards Germany in the future. Already during the Polish-British talks on March 26, Lipski, returning from Warsaw, conveys a clear rejection of the German Danzig proposal to the German Foreign Minister. He adds—as already mentioned—that there will be war with Poland if Germany continues to pursue its plan to recapture Danzig. This first threat of war from a Polish diplomat might not have occurred if the Polish government had not anticipated that England and France would fight on Poland's side. Hitler's first directive for war against Poland is issued only a week after the Polish ambassador's threat.

The British guarantee proved counterproductive in other ways as well. Poland's renewed, harsh rejection of Danzig's reintegration into the Reich demonstrated to Hitler that the path of negotiation was now clearly closed to him. Although Hitler still believed that England would abandon Poland in the crisis, and he once again offered Poland a deal on April 28th – "Danzig in exchange for concessions" – he also realized during this period that further talks with Poland under England's protection were virtually pointless. England's guarantee of March 1939 destroyed the last remaining chances of limiting the German-Polish dispute to Danzig and the extraterritorial transit routes. With England's backing, Poland could turn Danzig's return into a *casus belli*. If Germany wanted Danzig, it would now have to wage war against Poland. Lord Halifax's promise to the Poles in March 1939 is exactly the same as Kaiser Wilhelm II's promise to the Austrians in July 1914 that "Germany will stand by Austria-Hungary in its customary alliance loyalty." It is a blank check for Poland.

¹⁹³ Cause for a war

British Ambassador Henderson, who, from Berlin, recognized the danger posed by England's support for the Poles, wrote in a report to London on July 18, 1939: *"Hitler may well believe that England intends to wage war against Germany in any case. If he doesn't yet believe it, it won't take much to convince him otherwise. ... Let's be honest, I also don't consider it politically wise or even fair to excessively incite the Poles. ..."* When no further progress could be made at the negotiating table, Hitler—presumably in April 1939—set himself a date for Danzig's return to the German Reich.

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When Poland, assured of British and French military aid, remained firm, Hitler again tried to exert pressure on London, Paris, and Moscow. After the British-French attempt to bind the Soviet Union to an alliance against Germany failed on August 19, 1939, Hitler took advantage of the new situation on August 25. He offered the British government an alliance if London would assist in the recapture of Danzig and the Polish Corridor. In return, Hitler offered a guarantee of Poland's new borders and German assistance in the defense of the British Empire, wherever in the world it might be needed.¹⁹⁵ However, London was by now firmly resolved to support Poland's position on the Danzig question. Disappointment over Hitler's actions toward Czechoslovakia ran too deep. They did not trust the new guarantee regarding Poland's borders.

On the day of Hitler's offer, August 25, London and Warsaw concluded the mutual assistance agreement that Beck and Halifax had promised each other in London on April 6. Article 1 of the new protection agreement reiterated the April promises to "immediately provide all assistance within the power of the supporting contracting party" in the event of an attack by third states. Article 2 of the treaty, however, significantly expanded the old promise of assistance. It stated: *"Article 2*

(1) The commitments set out in Article 1 shall also apply in the event that a European State directly or indirectly threatens the independence of a Contracting Party and that the Contracting Party in question considers it necessary to resist this threat with its armed forces.

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¹⁹⁴ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VI, Document 347

¹⁹⁵ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, pages 233

¹⁹⁶ ff British War Bluebook, Document 19

This means Great Britain has committed itself to intervening even if Poland deems it necessary to offer military resistance in the face of an "indirect threat." With this wording, it is up to Warsaw to decide when an indirect threat—whatever that may be—becomes a case for war. This is a *carte blanche* for Poland to resist German pressure for annexation.

To declare Danzig an "indirect threat" to the Reich and to respond militarily. Even in such a case, England would be obligated under Article 2 to immediately support Poland with all the forces at its disposal. Thus, the English government binds itself to the foreseeable decisions of the Polish government.

It is virtually impossible that the British, with their extensive global experience, would have formulated the mutual assistance agreement in such a flexible and unintentional manner. With their far-reaching guarantee, they destroyed the last slim chance of any concessions from Poland on the Danzig question. Since Poland had long since declared that any change to the Danzig Statute would mean war, and since Germany had announced its intention to annex Danzig from September 1939 onward, even without Poland's consent, England's promise of protection amounted to nothing less than a declaration of intent to participate in the war—now, thanks to its own actions, virtually certain—on Poland's side against Germany. The British protection agreement of August 25, 1939, stands in remarkable contrast to the last-minute mediation efforts of the London government in the days that followed. In the final days before the outbreak of war, Great Britain was mediating at a door it had, in effect, closed itself. If one considers only the Anglo-Polish mutual assistance treaty of August 25th and disregards the subsequent British mediation attempts, the impression arises that the British government ultimately orchestrated the outbreak of war with cunning. The "Danzig Affair" – so it may have been – created the cleverly orchestrated, yet outwardly unintentional, "War Affair," in which Great Britain, with the help of the Poles, French, and Americans, could put an end to the growing power of the German Reich. Such a war would then also eliminate Hitler's demands for the return of the former German colonies.

With the promise from London in hand, Warsaw—just a week before the outbreak of war—was no longer prepared to make even a single concession to Germany on the Danzig question. Poland rejected Germany's claims to Danzig and the transit routes through the Polish Corridor under German sovereignty and, therefore, reliant on Great Britain, abandoned the partnership with Germany that had developed since 1934. With this shift, the Polish government was banking on a British interest in Poland's fate that, in reality, did not exist. Thus, in 1939, Poland switched to the anti-German camp, sealing its fate for the next 50 years.

A secret additional protocol, signed by Britain and Poland as a supplement to their mutual assistance pact, sheds light on England's interests. The secret additional protocol of August 25th clarifies that the alliance is only valid against Germany.¹⁹⁷ Thus, Britain does not have to protect Poland from the Soviet Union if the latter does what is obvious. Given the Soviet threat, which threatened Poland just as much as the German threat, the additional protocol makes it clear that Britain's primary aim is to halt Germany's rise to power, not to protect Poland. When the Red Army invaded Poland on September 17, 1939, and annexed "Eastern Poland," the British government simply acknowledges this without taking any action.

The failed British-French-Soviet Approach

During the 1930s, England and France watched with growing unease as Germany reorganized itself domestically, economically, and militarily.

At the time of the Austrian Anschluss and the annexation of the Sudetenland in 1938, both countries felt unable to militarily oppose German demands. In the case of Austria and the Sudetenland, the right of peoples to self-determination and 1,000 years of shared history also supported the desires of the Germans, Austrians, and Sudeten Germans. However, the unease of the British and French was not lessened by the legitimacy of this "return to the Reich" policy.

The Soviet Union, initially not threatened by the German Reich, had other plans and problems. Since the First World War, it had been largely excluded from political participation in Europe. At the Munich Conference, it was even excluded by England, France, Germany, and Italy. Thus, Russia attempted, sometimes with French and English support, sometimes with the help of Germany, to find its way back onto the stage of major European politics.

Russia's immediate goal is to reclaim the Belarusian and Ukrainian territories east of the Curzon Line, which Poland conquered in 1921. Its long-term goal is to spread Marxism to Western Europe. The path to both goals leads directly through Poland.

Stalin believed that both goals could one day fall to the Soviet Union as ripe fruit, without further effort, as a result of a European war between capitalist states.

¹⁹⁷ Documents of International Affairs 1939-1946, Volume 1, page 471 and Michaelis, pages 506 ff.

Stalin hoped that at the end of such a war, Europe, with its weakened states, impoverished populations, and battered armies, would become easy prey for Marxist revolution and Soviet expansion. Here, Stalin resembled Hitler, who—as the Hossbach Protocol recounts—initially also anticipated wars in Europe without Germany's involvement. Thus, at the beginning of 1939, the Soviet Union sought its way back onto the European stage. It attempted, through almost simultaneous talks with the Western powers on the one hand and with Germany on the other, to improve its starting position for future territorial and spheres of influence. The occupation of Czechoslovakia on March 16, 1939, provided Stalin with a welcome opportunity. With Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia, German foreign policy abandoned the ground of its legitimate claims and began poaching. The response was swift.

On the very day of the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, March 16, 1939, French Foreign Minister Bonnet proposed Franco-Soviet consultations to the Soviet ambassador in Paris. He suggested discussing joint measures in the event of further German actions against an Eastern European country. On the 18th, Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov responded with a similar proposal to the governments in Paris, London, Warsaw, Bucharest, and Ankara.¹⁹⁸ The very next day, British Foreign Secretary Halifax followed suit with a corresponding note to his French, Polish, and Soviet counterparts. Halifax was now attempting to arrange a Franco-British-Polish-Soviet alliance against the German Reich.

However, Poland – as already described – did not want to risk Soviet patronage and thwarted the first attempt by the major powers to reach an agreement. The result was not only the British guarantee to Poland of March 31st, mentioned earlier. Poland subsequently also foiled the further attempt by the British and French to bring the Soviets on board for a future war against Germany.

Although the Soviets negotiated an alliance against the German Reich with the British and French in the spring and summer of 1939, they kept the back door open throughout this period, in order to perhaps intervene not against, but with, Germany in the Polish campaign.

On April 14, 1939, French, British, and Soviet negotiators began talks about joining forces against Germany. On the 17th, the Soviets proposed a triple alliance against Germany to the British and French. On the same day, the Soviet ambassador, Merekalov, visited State Secretary von Weizsäcker in Berlin and explained to him,

"that ideological differences of opinion did not need to disturb the German-Russian relationship, as was the case with the Russian-Italian relationship"

¹⁹⁸ Shirer, page 428

¹⁹⁹ Maser, page 74

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That's the case with relationships. He continues: "The Soviet Union did not cause the current friction between Germany and the Western democracies

*exploited against Germany and does not wish to do so."*²⁰⁰ Thus, in April 1939, the Soviets stood at the door of the British and French, yet made sure that the door of the Germans remained open to them.

Between April 15 and June 23, the British and Soviet governments each exchanged seven notes to outline the framework for cooperation against Germany. On July 8 and 17, the governments in Paris and London presented a draft treaty to Moscow, which the Russians only accepted after the British and French assured them they would enter into military negotiations regarding a war against Germany.

At that time, there were no plans in Germany to wage war against France, England, or Russia. On July 24, a Franco-British-Soviet agreement on military cooperation was initialed but not signed. This meant that no one was definitively bound, but it paved the way for negotiations between the general staffs of the British, French, and Soviets.

Even after this, the Russian leadership continued to pull its strings in two different directions. On August 4, Stalin approved a document prepared by the People's Commissariats for Defense and Foreign Affairs entitled "Presentations for Negotiations with England and France," which outlined five different options for a deployment of up to 120 army divisions against Germany.²⁰² The following day, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Soviet Embassy in Berlin, Astakhov, visited Legation Counselor Schnurre at the Foreign Office and conveyed from Foreign Minister Molotov in Moscow that the Soviet Union was interested in normalizing and improving relations with Germany.²⁰³ Both the British and French, as well as the Germans, now continued to seek the Soviet Union's assistance.

On August 11, the military missions from London and Paris arrived in Moscow. On the 13th, the talks began. The British and French brought no concrete ideas to Moscow about how and with what forces they could wage their war against Germany. In contrast, the Soviet negotiators, led by Marshal Voroshilov, presented the five deployment options against Germany approved by Stalin.

²⁰⁰ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document

²⁰¹ 215; Maser,

²⁰² page 53; Maser,

²⁰³ page 22; Maser, page 75; and ADAP, Series D, Volume VI,

²⁰⁴ Document 772. The protocol of the Soviet-French-British military negotiations described below is taken from an article in the Russian newspaper "International Life," Issue 3/1959, pages 139-158 (Moscow). See also Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 239 ff.

land. Depending on the scenario, they offer to deploy 70 to 100% of the armed forces against Germany that the British and French have also planned.²⁰⁵ This involves a maximum of 2 million men and 102 Soviet divisions, attacks against East Prussia and Silesia, 5,500 aircraft, bombers with ranges of up to 4,000 kilometers, and also the deployment of the Soviet Northern Fleet and the Black Sea Fleet to cut Germany off from ore and oil imports. This is the army force that the Wehrmacht is capable of mustering with its reserve divisions, and the air force more than the German fleet of frontline aircraft. Even if Russia sided with Poland, Germany would thus be drawn into a two-front war in a conflict over Danzig, facing a force disadvantage of 2.5 to 1. Marshal Voroshilov commented on this to the British and French military delegations with the following words:

"The operations of the Soviet troops against East Prussia and in Galicia, and the operations of England and France in the west would mean the end of Germany."

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If the Soviet Union were to provide military support to Poland against Germany, Soviet armed forces would have to be allowed to march across Polish territory. Poland now fears, recalling the old Curzon Line dispute with Russia, that the passage of support troops could inadvertently turn into a Russian occupation of "Eastern Poland." Consequently, the Polish government refuses to consent to such an alliance.

This is one reason for the failure of the Soviet-French-British talks. The other is the refusal of the British and French military delegations to make concrete commitments of military aid to the Soviets. The French, in the event of war, only wanted to protect their own borders and not, like the Russians, invade Germany, and the head of the British delegation was not authorized to negotiate in writing. The Russians were left with the impression that, in the event of war, the Soviet Union would be left to bear the brunt of the Poles, British, and French. Thus, the Franco-British-Soviet negotiations dragged on until August 21st and were then broken off without success. For Stalin, the second solution for acquiring "Eastern Poland" was now open: a pact with Hitler.

As early as August 19, Stalin secured the Politburo's approval to enter into an alliance with Germany instead of France and England. He justified this reversal of course before the Soviet Union's highest decision-making body with a thorough analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of both courses of action for the Russians. Stalin based his analysis on the very high probability of a war between Germany and the Soviet Union.

²⁰⁵ Maser, page

²⁰⁶ 26; Maser, page 30 and Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Appendix II

The situation was divided between the UK on one side and England and France on the other. A confrontation between Germany and the trio of England, France, and the Soviet Union would predictably end too quickly in a German defeat. However, a war in which the Germans only had to fight against the British and French would be more protracted. Therefore, it was wiser to support Germany, which was considered weaker, rather than the British and French. In this way, a war between the capitalist states could be drawn out longer, thus depleting the resources of these states more than would have been the case with a swift British and French victory over Germany.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, the prospect of a two-front war against an overwhelming force carried the risk that Hitler would abandon the idea of a war over Danzig. Thus, on August 19, Stalin and the Politburo decided to change course and negotiate with Germany. On the same day, the decision was made to double the number of rifle divisions.

Two facets of these futile Anglo-French-Soviet rapprochement efforts become apparent when the entire process is examined closely and carefully. Firstly, it is noteworthy that England and France were attempting to forge an alliance with a dictatorship. Soviet Russia was itself a state with ambitions of world domination. It was pointedly anti-democratic and, as everyone in France and Great Britain knew, it ruthlessly trampled on the human rights of its citizens. The state-sanctioned crimes, as evidenced, for example, by the purges of the Russian elites in 1936 and 1937, were well known in the West in 1939. The same Winston Churchill who, in May 1919, declared before the Aldwych Club in London: *"Of all the tyrannies in history, the Bolshevik one is the*

*worst, most devastating, most humiliating. It's pure nonsense. to pretend that it is not much worse than German militarism."*²⁰⁸

On May 19, 1939, before the House of Commons, Churchill succinctly defended the alliance with this "Bolshevik tyranny" in terms of British interests: *"Without an*

*effective Eastern Front, there will be no adequate defense of our interests in the West, and without Russia, there is no Eastern Front."*²⁰⁹ Churchill, in his opposition to Germany, was

evidently untroubled by any scruples about cooperating with an anti-democratic dictatorship whose state-sanctioned murder rate far surpassed Germany's. The political elites of England and France sought an alliance with an obviously criminal dictatorship, justifying this by claiming to uphold democracy and human rights and to thwart Germany's ambitions for world domination. The attempt to conclude a pact with a dictatorship that violated the law and

²⁰⁷ Magenheimer, page 18. Some historians consider the two discovered transcripts of these Stalin statements to be forgeries. Others cite evidence of their authenticity. Their content at least corresponds to the logic of the aforementioned Lenin speech of December 6, 1920.

²⁰⁸ Bernhardt, page 32

²⁰⁹ Churchill Memoirs, page 454

Freedom in one's own country has been strangled for almost two decades, revealing the claim to protect law, freedom, and democracy as a pretext for entirely different purposes. England and France wanted to prevent Germany's further strengthening in the summer of 1939. Both states were concerned with their own power, not with Poland or human rights.

The other facet, which is completely overlooked in German historiography, is a deal the British and French were prepared to make. During the Anglo-French-Soviet talks in July 1939, the Soviet side continually increased its demands for an alliance against Germany. Among the "sacrifices" the Russians demanded of the British and French was the transfer of the three small Baltic states into the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. British Foreign Secretary Halifax accepted this only grudgingly, but the French government insisted that an alliance with Russia should not fail over this issue.²¹⁰ As mentioned, the alliance ultimately failed due to Poland's objection and the British-French refusal to commit to a concrete form of military aid. Thus, in July 1939, the French and British were quite prepared to entrust the Baltic states to the Soviet Union's "protection" in order to secure Russian military support against Germany.

In his speech to the House of Commons on May 19, 1939, already cited, Churchill justified the handover of the three Baltic states to the Soviets by citing an alleged "community of interest" between Russians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians. He explained:

"What about the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, for whose sake Peter the Great went to war? Russia has the greatest interest in ensuring that these countries do not fall into the hands of Nazi Germany."

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Four weeks later, the German Reich government committed the same "crime" that the British and French had failed to accomplish in July 1939 thanks to the Polish veto: Germany, through the Molotov-Ribbentrop secret agreement, ceded Latvia and Estonia to the Soviet sphere of influence. To clarify the "crime," it must be noted that neither the British, French, nor Germans allowed the Soviets to annex Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The three countries only granted the Russians the inclusion of the Baltic states in their sphere of influence. The course of these futile Anglo-French efforts to conclude a pact with the Soviet Union in July 1939 dismantles the pre-war policies of both democracies. Their motivation was not morality or ideals, but solely power.

²¹⁰ Rassiner, page 261 and Benoist-Mechin, Volume 7, pages 231 ff.

²¹¹ Churchill memoirs, pages 454 ff.

German-Soviet understanding

Even before the planned signing of the completed treaty between London, Moscow, and Paris, Warsaw's objection to the alliance of the two Western powers with the Soviets was becoming apparent. Berlin took advantage of this stance and offered Moscow talks on August 4, 1939, to facilitate understanding. On August 12, even before the military delegations of England, France, and the Soviet Union had begun their negotiations in Moscow regarding a campaign against Germany, the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Berlin, Astakhov, contacted the Foreign Office for the second time, speaking to Schnurre, the head of the Eastern Europe desk. On behalf of Molotov, he conveyed that "the Soviets are interested in discussing the individual groups of issues raised so far." Among the issues of interest, Astakhov mentioned the "Polish problem."²¹² The Russian also immediately proposed that negotiations take place in Moscow.

On August 15, the second day of the British-French-Russian negotiations, German-Soviet talks began in Moscow. Ambassador Count von der Schulenburg visited Foreign Minister Molotov and requested an appointment for his minister, von Ribbentrop, to meet with Stalin. Molotov welcomed the German intention to seek an improvement in relations with the Soviet Union. He then indicated to the Count what the Soviets were interested in. These were four matters. First, Moscow hoped for a moderating influence from Berlin on Tokyo, as the Soviet Union and Japan were still at war. Second and third, Molotov desired a non-aggression pact and a trade and credit agreement with Germany. The fourth wish was clearly a deception. Molotov spoke of jointly guaranteeing the Baltic states.²¹³ Count von der Schulenburg immediately reported his visit with Molotov to Berlin. It is noteworthy that he followed the report the next day with a short letter in which he expressed his doubts that the Soviets truly intended to guarantee the continued existence of the Baltic states jointly with the Germans.²¹⁴ That short letter of August 16th coincides with the next directive from Berlin. In this directive, von Ribbentrop assured the Soviets of a non-aggression pact for 25 years and also indicated that he would, as requested, exert influence on Japan. Again noteworthy is that von Ribbentrop declared that the German Reich was prepared "to guarantee the Baltic states jointly with the Soviet Union."²¹⁵

The following day, August 17, the German ambassador contacted Molotov a second time and conveyed the reactions from Berlin. The Soviet

²¹² ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 50

²¹³ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 79

²¹⁴ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 88

²¹⁵ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 75

The Foreign Minister, for his part, submitted a written response to the questions that had remained unanswered since Schulenburg's first audience with him. In this reply, the requests for a trade and credit agreement and a non-aggression pact were reiterated. Furthermore, Molotov acknowledged in this letter that, as a result of Germany's anti-Soviet stance, the Soviet Union had been forced to *"take initial measures to prepare a defensive front against possible aggression against the Soviet Union from Germany."*

This undoubtedly refers to the attacks against East Prussia and Silesia proposed to the British and French three days ago. The letter continues:

"... that the Soviet government never had any aggressive intentions against Germany..."

Instead of the previously stated intention of jointly guaranteeing the continued existence of the Baltic republics with the German Reich, Molotov now proposes a "special protocol" that "forms an integral part of the pact." "Integrative part" means that this "special protocol" will be bundled with the treaty that the German Reich government wants. Germany—so the message goes—will get both or nothing. Since Molotov's letter contains no information about the content of this protocol, von der Schulenburg immediately asks the Russian minister about the Soviet government's wishes in this regard. Molotov gives no answer, but—as we know today—the "special protocol" became, just a week later, the "secret additional protocol" with which the German Reich government acknowledges that eastern Poland, Bessarabia, Finland, and the Baltic states belong to the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. The Soviets had already laid the groundwork for the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 24th, while still at the same location discussing a war with Germany with the British and French.

Ambassador von der Schulenburg cabled Molotov's letter to Minister von Ribbentrop early in the morning of August 18, who sent his reply the same day. The German Foreign Minister wrote, without knowledge of Stalin's wishes and misunderstanding the meaning of the "special protocol," that the Reich government agreed to the "guarantee of the Baltic states."²¹⁷

On August 19, the British and French governments informed the Soviet government that they would not sign the previously negotiated Franco-Soviet treaty due to the objection of the Polish government. This cleared the way for Russia's switch sides. At 4 p.m., the German ambassador was summoned again to the Foreign Ministry to see Molotov. Molotov presented him with

²¹⁶ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 105

²¹⁷ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 113

a draft text for the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The treaty text does not yet contain the additional protocol, but it ends with the sentence:

"The current pact is only valid if a special protocol is signed simultaneously on the points of interest to the contracting parties in the field of foreign policy." Count von der Schulenburg transmitted the text to Germany that ²¹⁸

same night. The "cat" with the Baltic states was thus still not "out of the bag."

Now, one step follows another. Hitler—under time pressure due to the Danzig crisis—focuses on the non-aggression pact with Stalin, which he hopes will persuade the Poles, British, and French to back down on the Danzig Corridor issue. He does not look at the additional protocol, the contents of which he still does not know. On August 20, Hitler telegraphs Stalin, informing him that he accepts the draft of the non-aggression pact and that he intends to send Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop with the "most comprehensive general authority" to sign the treaty and to "draft and sign the protocol." On August 21, Stalin thanks Hitler for the telegram and invites von Ribbentrop to Moscow on August 23.

When Hitler informed the army and army group commanders of the now-assembled Wehrmacht at the Berghof near Salzburg on August 22nd that he had decided to wage war against Poland, he did not yet know that 24 hours later Stalin would have Ribbentrop secretly sign over large parts of Eastern Europe to him as Soviet spheres of influence. Hitler still believed that Ribbentrop was to sign the guarantee for the three Baltic states in Moscow. He could, however, suspect that

Stalin will demand a price for the non-aggression pact, but he doesn't know that four weeks later Russia will seize two-thirds of Poland for itself. The following day, August 23, Ribbentrop arrives in Moscow. At 6 p.m., Stalin and Molotov receive Ribbentrop and Count von der Schulenburg in the Kremlin.

After a brief and polite greeting, they quickly got down to business. The non-aggression pact, which they soon agreed upon, corresponded almost entirely to the Russian draft, except for the fact that it was to be valid for ten years instead of the five proposed by the Soviets. Then the discussion turned to the secret additional protocol desired by Stalin. Von Ribbentrop, to whom Hitler had granted unrestricted negotiating authority, was not entirely confident in his position given Stalin's demands. Around 10 p.m., he requested a short break in the talks and obtained Hitler's approval by telephone.²²¹

²¹⁸ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 133

²¹⁹ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 142

²²⁰ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 159

²²¹ Maser, page 41

Faced with the choice of maintaining his freedom of action regarding Danzig with Stalin's backing against Poland, Great Britain, and France, or relinquishing Danzig, the extraterritorial transit routes, and the protection of the German minority in Poland without Stalin, Hitler accepted the spheres of influence demanded by the Russian leader. Hitler, who had not previously been aware of Stalin's demands, apparently decided without much hesitation. Shortly after midnight on August 24, the Non-Aggression Pact and the Secret Additional Protocol were signed by Molotov and Ribbentrop. The two crucial sections of the Additional Protocol read: *"1. In the event of a territorial-political reorganization in the territories belonging to the Baltic states (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern border of Lithuania shall*

simultaneously form the boundary between the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR. Lithuania's interest in the Vilna region is thereby recognized by both sides."

2. In the event of a territorial-political reorganization of the territories belonging to the Polish state, the spheres of interest of Germany and the USSR will be roughly delimited by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula and San.

The question of whether the mutual interests make the preservation of an independent Polish state desirable, and how this state should be defined, can only be definitively clarified in the course of further political developments. ..."

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The German-Soviet unification, so soon after the failure of the preceding Franco-British-Soviet negotiations, was a sensation for all of Europe, a shock for Great Britain and France, and yet no reason for Poland to approach Germany on the Danzig question. The surprise was so great because relations between Moscow and Berlin had not been free of strains and contradictions since the First World War. The relationship between the two states was quite fluctuating, and not always to Poland's disadvantage. Germany pursued—especially from 1933 onward—a clearly anti-communist domestic and foreign policy. In this way, the German-Polish relationship, burdened by border issues, stood in contrast to a German-Soviet relationship burdened by ideological issues. But when Poland annexed West Teschen against the warnings of Soviet Russia, and when it refused, against the urgent wishes of the Germans, to pave the way for the reintegration of Danzig, it violated the interests of both neighbors. Poland jeopardized its hitherto normal neighborly relations over two small patches of land, neither of which were even Polish. It risked a settlement between the Soviet Union and Germany, both of which laid claim to Russian- and German-populated land in Poland, respectively, at Poland's expense. And that is exactly what happened.

²²² ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 228

²²³ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 229

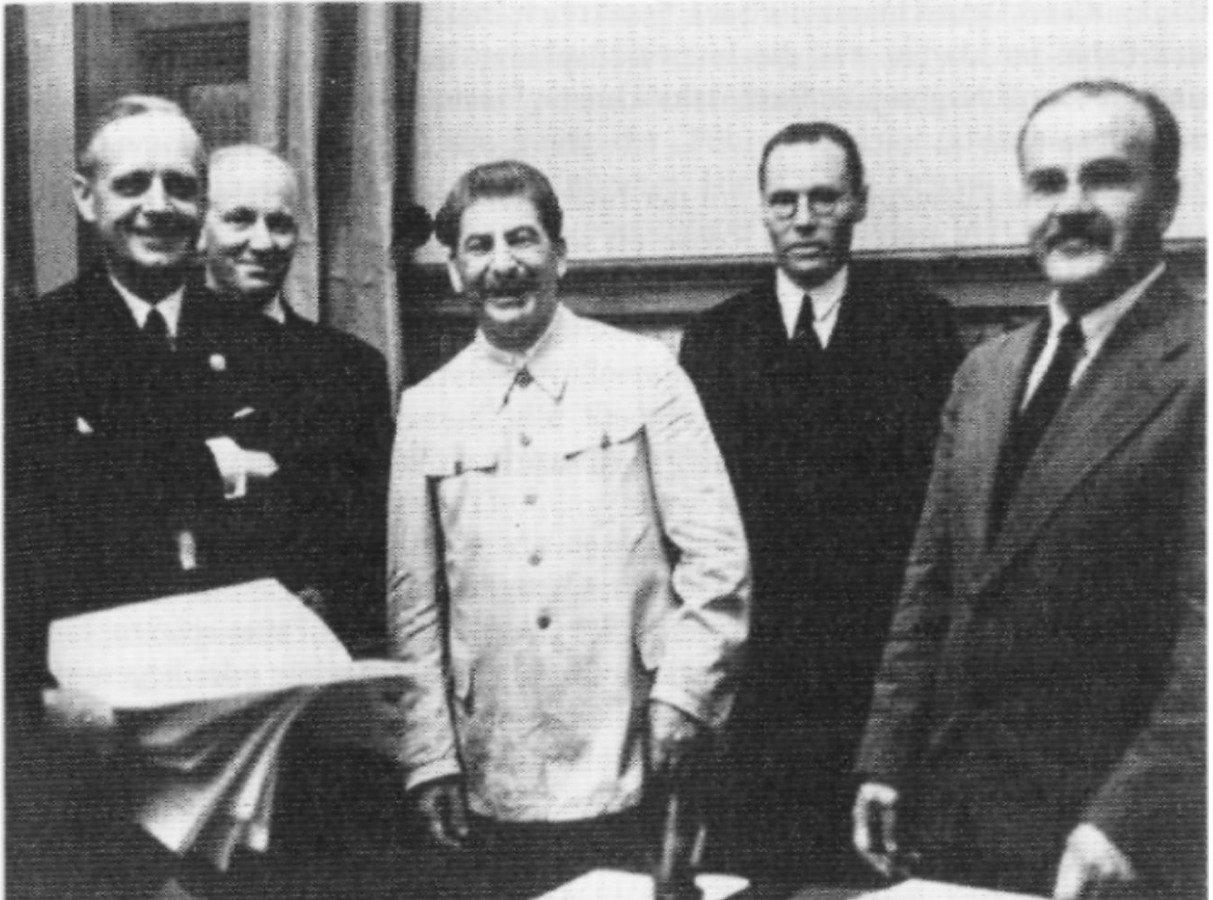


Fig. 12: After the signing. From left:
Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, Legation Counselor Hencke, Joseph Stalin,
Legation Counselor Hilger and Foreign Minister Molotov

The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact assures both Germany and Russia that, in the event of war, the other power will not side with Poland. Thus, the German-Soviet antagonism no longer offers any protection for the Poles in the middle.

The Secret Additional Protocol speaks only of spheres of interest. It does not express that the Soviet Union is now permitted to annex Finland and the Baltic states. However harshly this German-Soviet secret agreement is later criticized, it corresponds to the customs of that time. It was quite common at that time among all major powers to delineate spheres of interest without consulting the countries within those spheres. Thus, as already mentioned, Great Britain and Italy concluded such an agreement in April 1938:²²⁴ England gave Italy a "free hand" in Abyssinia and vis-à-vis Spain and, in return, secured a guarantee of freedom of action in Central Europe. In the British-French-Soviet negotiations already described, held in July 1939, the participants also attempted to define their spheres of influence. Both

²²⁴ British-Italian agreement of 16 April 1938, see Churchill memoirs, page 115

England and Germany, as well as France, Italy, and the Soviet Union, were fully aware of what these spheres of influence truly meant. They represented the authorization to act and exert power at the expense of the smaller states within those spheres.

The secret additional protocol, which defined the sphere of influence boundary across Poland, was passed to US President Roosevelt the very next day by the German diplomat Herwarth von Bittenfeld from Moscow. Roosevelt failed to inform the Poles of it promptly.²²⁵

The Vatican's mediation attempt

In this period of multifaceted negotiations and coalition talks, when most European states are primarily concerned with positioning themselves favorably for a potential war, and when they are all playing with fire, the Holy See remains the only authority without its own territorial or hegemonic interests. Pope Pius XII recognizes that another war in Europe will produce few victors but many losers among the Christian-Western nations.

Poland and Germany are in dispute over territories with German populations under Polish sovereignty. England has sided with Poland in this dispute. Italy is making claims against France for Djibouti, Corsica, and Nice.

England and Italy have differences over the Suez Canal. France still refuses to release Germany from the shackles of Versailles and opposes Germany on the Danzig question. England denies any continental power a dominant position on the continent. With so many powder kegs and so many lit fuses, any spark anywhere in Europe could set the continent ablaze in no time.

In this highly volatile situation, Pope Pius XII is attempting to defuse the disputes between the five major powers at a five-power peace conference, and if possible, to resolve them and thus preserve peace in Europe. The Holy Father, a head of the Church with extensive diplomatic experience, knows that such conferences must be prepared through soundings with the participants if they are to be successful. He is therefore sending Church diplomats to the capitals of the five countries involved.

The first such meeting took place on May 1, 1939, with Mussolini. After a day of deliberation, the Italian "Duce" agreed to the Pope's plan without reservation or conditions.²²⁶ On May 5, the Berlin nuncio, Monsignor Orsenigo, visited Adolf Hitler in Berchtesgaden. The minutes of the

²²⁵ Herwarth, page 188

²²⁶ Rassiner, page 246

According to accounts, the "Führer" "did not believe there was a danger of war, as the tense atmosphere was due more to incitement than to facts."²²⁷ However, Hitler reserved the right to consult with Mussolini before agreeing to the conference. Both the "Führer" and the "Duce" had mutually agreed to such consultations. Hitler asked Orsenigo "to convey his sincere thanks to the Holy See" and immediately instructed Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop to consult with Mussolini. Thus, by May 5, both dictators had agreed in one instance and not in the other.

On May 5, French Foreign Minister Bonnet was also informed of Pius XII's peace plan. Shortly thereafter, President Daladier personally informed the papal nuncio in Paris that France "would not participate in any conference held under the threat of German cannons."²²⁸ When the nuncio pressed him further, Daladier brushed it off, remarking that such a conference would "make it clear to everyone that the Pope was only being used to pull Italy's chestnuts out of the fire and prepare for a new Munich." Shortly afterwards, the Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay Leger explained the French rejection of the peace conference to the US Ambassador Bullitt in Paris in a completely different way: *Should such a conference take place, "it would be expected of both France and Poland that they – with the Pope as arbitrator and Great Britain as chief arbitrator above them – would make concessions to Germany and Italy"... as far as Poland was concerned, it was believed at the Quai d'Orsay that Warsaw "would not accept the arbitration of a foreign power in the matter of the German demands".*

*Otherwise, France feared that England would "arbitrate away" the interests of the French and Poles at the conference in order to keep the negotiations away from the otherwise unavoidable topic of the British colonies.*²³⁰

In other words, France did not want a peace in 1939 that might cost it its own concessions.

On May 5th, the Pope's plan was also presented to Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary. He sent his reply the same day by telegram to the British Ambassador to the Vatican, which stated:

*"May His Holiness offer his good offices separately and successively to Poland and Germany, France and Italy."*²³¹

At that time, England refused to participate in negotiations regarding the dispute over Danzig or the Italian-French conflicts. After

²²⁷ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 331

²²⁸ Tansill, page 564;

²²⁹ Secretary of State of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs

²³⁰ Tansill, pages 564 ff.;

²³¹ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume V, page 435

Given the bitter experience of the Munich Peace Conference, which ultimately failed to save Czech independence because Hitler did not keep his word, London has no further need for such conferences.

The Polish Foreign Minister comments on the Pope's conference proposal that Poland does not wish to participate in any conference concerning Polish concessions to Germany. Poland does not wish to participate in a "second Munich Conference".²³²

Mussolini, who had initially agreed to Pius XII's conference plan, and Hitler, who had initially not rejected it, responded to the Pope's offer after the rejection by the French, the British, and the Poles on the 12th.

May with a coordinated note. Both point out that

"the atmospheric situation does not currently seem so favorable to to serve an international discussion in a wider circle," and request that ²³³ papal mediation be avoided.

Pope Pius XII's attempt was one of Europe's last chances to avoid a war like the one that would eventually erupt. But Hitler had already destroyed the basis for such a peace conference—a minimum level of mutual trust—before Pius XII had even put forward his proposal.

The failure of this papal initiative in May 1939 makes it clear that Since the annexation of Czechoslovakia as a German protectorate, England and France are no longer primarily interested in maintaining peace in Europe, but rather in containing Germany, even if that means war. From the British perspective, what matters now is not the incorporation of Danzig into Poland or Germany, but solely Germany's behavior towards Poland. Poland's further behavior towards Germany is no longer of concern to England.

Two further peace initiatives by the Pope immediately before the outbreak of war also proved unsuccessful.²³⁴

The subsequent course of events, however, shows that Europe would likely not have been spared another war over the balance of power on the continent even without Danzig. Western Europe probably would not have accepted Stalin's invasion of Finland in November 1939 without intervening. At the latest, however, with the planned attack by the Soviet Union against the German Reich, the states of Western Europe would have had to defend their political and social systems against Bolshevism and take sides. Despite his advanced preparations for an attack against Germany, Stalin only managed to...

²³² Tansill, page 565

²³³ ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document

²³⁴ 372 On August 24, 1939 and on August 31, 1939

half of it didn't happen because Hitler started his campaign against the Soviet Union a few weeks earlier.

The escalation of the situation in Gdansk and in Poland

For the people of Poland, Germany, and the Free City of Danzig, the year 1939 leading up to the outbreak of war was more than just a period of intense diplomatic activity. For many, it was above all a time of heightened emotions. The negotiations—some open, some secret—regarding border adjustments and coalitions for the war that seemed imminent were, in any case, barely comprehensible to the citizens of Europe.

In Danzig, the desire for annexation to the motherland is growing. In Germany, people believe they are in the right when Hitler demands the annexation of Danzig and secure transport routes to isolated East Prussia. And in Poland, anger and hatred are increasing against disloyal fellow citizens of German, Belarusian, and Ukrainian languages.

Since England's guarantees and France's military promises, a feeling of certainty of victory has been growing in Poland, a feeling that oscillates between dream and intoxication. In Germany, the population wants Danzig, but not war.

And in Danzig, neither Germans nor Poles found the moderation that would have been appropriate in 1939. With the British guarantee for Poland in March and the denunciation of the German-Polish Treaty in April, tensions between Berlin and Warsaw escalated, and the German minority in Poland was immediately made to feel the effects. From May 1939 onward, Polish violence against Germans again took on terrible forms. In the countryside, German farms were set on fire in large numbers by Poles, farmers were driven away, and people in the cities were beaten, in some cases even killed.

German church services were so frequently stormed and broken up that the Vatican felt compelled to complain to the Polish government. In the summer of 1939, the German Reich government had to establish reception camps to cope with the influx of German refugees from Poland.²³⁵

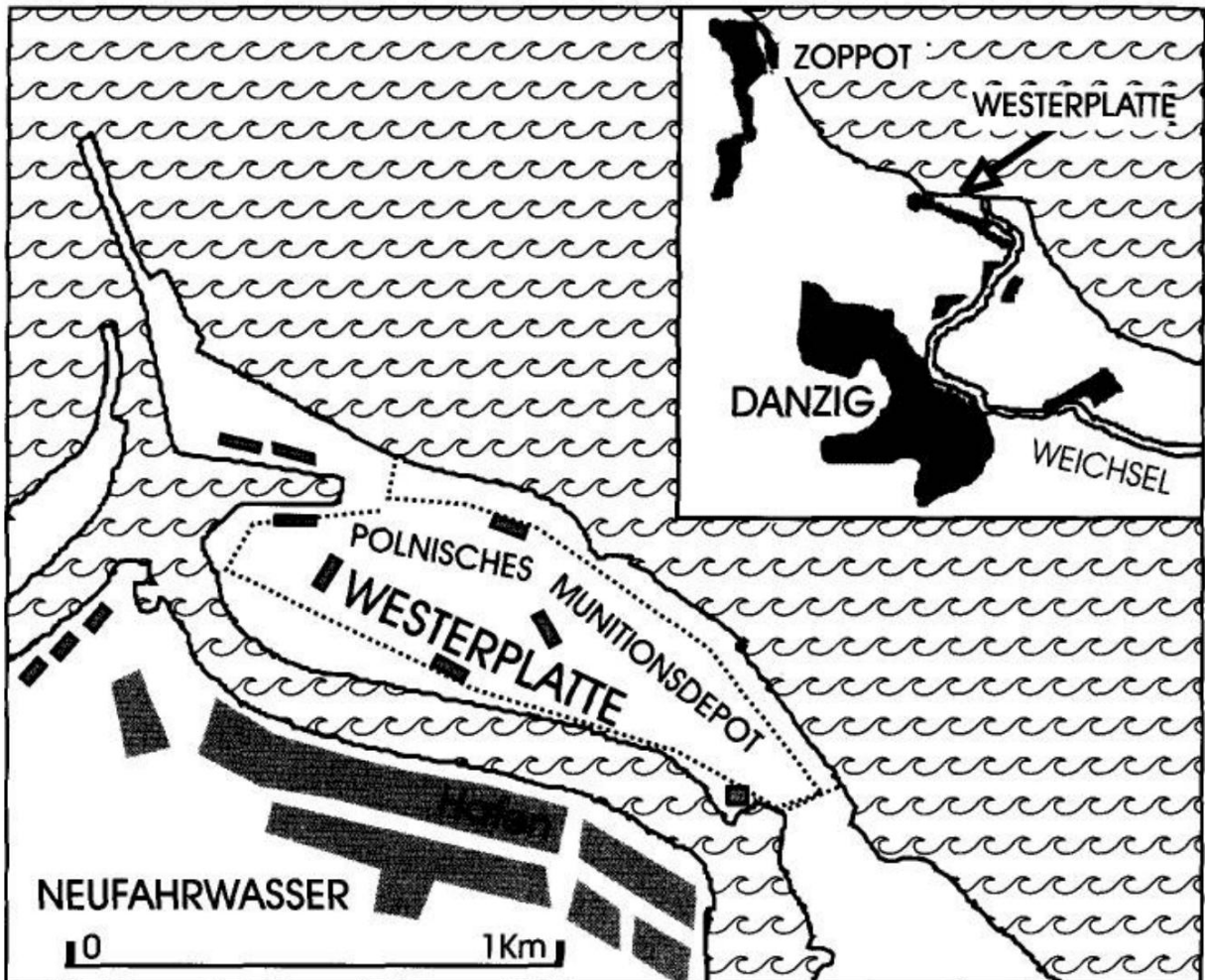
From June 1939 onwards, mutual accusations and suspicions increased in the Free City of Danzig between the German population of Danzig and the Polish authorities in Danzig. ²³⁶ Polish military transports passed through the Danzig territory without having been reported to the German Danzig Senate beforehand, as had been agreed. The Polish military garrison in the munitions depot

²³⁵ The number of refugees in German territory reached 78,000 by mid-August.

Reichs and another 18,000 who sought refuge in Danzig. See Rasmus, pages 28 ff.

²³⁶ The following account is based on the book by the League of Nations representative for Danzig, Prof. Burckhardt "My Danzig Mission", pages 321–345, and the files in the ADAP.

The number of soldiers stationed on Westerplatte, near Danzig's port, is increased to 240, although the League of Nations had only permitted 88. The Polish customs officers, originally six, have now grown to 110.²³⁷ When German-Danzig authorities object to the military transports and the reinforcements to the Polish Commissioner General at the Danzig Senate, Mr. Chodacki, he dismisses the complaints.



Map 34: Gdansk and Westerplatte (like Map 29)

A dispute, known as the "customs inspectors' dispute," became particularly critical in the summer of 1939. From May onwards, controls and the behavior of Polish customs officials towards the residents of Danzig intensified in the small-scale border traffic, which was of particular importance to the people there due to their isolated location. Furthermore, the Polish customs officials assumed authority over their German colleagues that they did not possess.²³⁸ And, to the annoyance of the German side, the number of Polish officials was significantly increased. The German police claimed that some of the additional customs officials belonged to the Polish intelligence service and were being sent to Gdansk in this way.

²³⁷ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VI, Document 6

²³⁸ According to the Treaty of Warsaw, Polish customs officials are neither superior nor subordinate to German customs officials.

infiltrated. As a result, the German officials ceased cooperating properly with the Polish officials. The Polish officials, in turn, delayed the export of Danzig agricultural and fishery products, which spoiled particularly easily in the hot summer of 1939. In this tense situation, the President of the Danzig Senate wrote to the Polish Commissioner General, complaining about the incidents described and announcing that German customs officials would no longer accept instructions from the Polish officials. Commissioner General Chodacki immediately sent President Greiser an ultimatum to rescind this directive by 6 p.m. that same day,²³⁹ otherwise

"The Polish government will immediately retaliate against the free city."

Furthermore, Chodacki announces that Polish customs will be armed with immediate effect.²⁴⁰ The dispute is further fueled by the fact that a subordinate official from the Senate administration writes to Chodacki on his own initiative and without any instructions:

*"... The Gdansk authorities would violently resist any attempt by Polish customs inspectors to carry out their duties... with weapons."*²⁴¹

Hitler, consulted by the President of the Senate, urges that tensions be eased and that "the matter not be poisoned further."²⁴² President Greiser succeeds in persuading General Commissioner Chodacki to rescind the ultimatum.

However insignificant this incident may seem, it demonstrates how close the world is to the brink of war. State Secretary in the Foreign Office, von Weizsäcker, conveys the Reich government's disapproval of the customs inspectors' dispute, the ultimatum, and the threat against the population of Danzig to the Polish chargé d'affaires in Berlin. The chargé d'affaires consults with his ministry in Warsaw and officially informs von Weizsäcker the following day that Poland will consider any interference by the Reich government in Polish-Danzig relations to Poland's detriment an "act of aggression."²⁴³ The Polish Foreign Ministry thus makes it clear that any stance taken by the Reich government in favor of Danzig and against Poland would mean war.

Given the insignificant customs dispute in Danzig, this is a very serious threat, especially since England and France had promised to support Poland in any war started by Germany.

Hitler expresses outrage at the Polish ultimatum in this already tense time, and he speaks of the fact that "the limit of his tolerance has been reached."

²³⁹ Chodacki ultimatum of August 5, 1939, 1:00 a.m., see ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 774.

²⁴⁰ According to the Treaty of Warsaw, Polish customs officers may only carry weapons if German customs officers also carry weapons.

²⁴¹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page

²⁴² 211; ADAP, Series D, Volume VI,

²⁴³ Document 771; v. Weizsäcker Memoirs, pages 244 f.

has been achieved." Poland's press is now adding fuel to the fire by writing that Hitler "backed down" in the customs dispute and that a single, slightly harsh note was enough "to bring him to his knees."²⁴⁴

British Ambassador Henderson comments on the Danzig incident on the 8th. In August, Hitler wrote to Foreign Secretary Halifax in London:

"The elements inclined to humiliate Germany are being encouraged by press articles in England and Poland... It may be that humiliation is salutary for Hitler, but if this dangerous policy is not that of His Majesty's Government, I earnestly suggest that every effort should be made in both Warsaw and London to prevent Hitler from being driven in the next few weeks into a situation where the dictator's pride will no longer permit him to slow down, even if he wanted to." This was three weeks before the war. The Chodacki ultimatum and Hitler's²⁴⁵

reaction to it so shortly before the outbreak of war allow us to draw conclusions about his intentions regarding Poland. If the "Führer" had truly wanted war with Poland, rather than just Danzig and the transit routes, he could easily have had it now. He would only have had to signal to the Danzig Senate not to back down in the customs inspectors dispute. Poland would then have taken action against the Free State, as threatened. Danzig could have responded by declaring its annexation to the German Reich, and Poland would—this is certain—have taken military action against Danzig. Thus, the Poles, not the Germans, would have triggered the war that was already looming. If Hitler had been determined to have war with Poland at the beginning of August 1939, he would hardly have let this opportunity slip by.

He probably would not have advised Senate President Greiser "not to poison the matter even more."

In addition to the real turmoil, there were also the imagined ones. On July 5, 1939, a rumor circulated that the "Führer" would be entering Danzig that day, and that the Anschluss with the Reich was only a matter of hours away. None of this was true, but it illustrated the increasingly tense situation in the isolated city.²⁴⁶ Also in July, the false news spread that the Poles were planning to occupy the railway lines within the Free State by force. The Polish government denied this, and nothing of the sort happened.

In July and August, the situation in Poland and on the Polish-German borders escalated to such an extent that Danzig almost became a secondary issue.²⁴⁷ In July, the anti-German demonstrations in Polish cities reached a new peak. Forced business and plant closures of companies with German-

²⁴⁴ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 213; Documents

²⁴⁵ Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VI, Document 585; Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 209; AA 1939

²⁴⁶ No. 2, Documents 393 to 444. The following events

²⁴⁷ are also in the STADER TAGE-

The July and August 1939 editions can be read in the newsletter.

Extortion by Polish owners is commonplace. In the Teschen region, recently acquired by Poland, German-speaking and Czech teachers, pastors, and civil servants are dismissed from their posts without pensions because they are deemed "disloyal and hostile to the state." In Upper Silesia, German-speaking workers and managers are being laid off en masse from industry, along with forestry officials and forest workers. More German schools are being forced to close by order of Polish authorities. From the beginning of July to mid-August 1939, German consuls in Poland report hundreds of attacks on ethnic Germans. These range from beatings to castration. Similar reports come from Galicia: mass arrests of Ukrainians, the destruction of numerous Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic churches, and, in Lviv, the banning of the Ukrainian-language newspaper DILO.

On the German side, Polish violence against members of the German minority is now being met with state reprisals against Poles within the Reich. The expulsions of Germans there are followed by the expulsions of Poles here. All of this, in turn, only further fuels anti-German sentiment in Poland.

Meanwhile, unrest is brewing in Danzig, albeit of a different kind. At large rallies, the city's German population is demanding annexation to the motherland with the slogan "Heim ins Reich" (Back to the Reich). In August, the SS Heimwehr makes its first public appearance with a parade through the streets of Danzig. And Gauleiter Forster provokes London and Paris completely unnecessarily. At a mass rally, he accuses the British and French of interfering unjustifiably in Danzig's affairs and of taking the side of the Poles.

*"It is none of their business how we want to shape our future. We Danzigers don't concern ourselves with how the English and French try to shape their destiny either."*²⁴⁸

Abroad, too, war is being talked up and the mood is being inflamed, which is hardly surprising after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Italy's attack on Albania, and the escalation in Poland. In April 1939, British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax informs US President Roosevelt that the British fleet could be the target of a German "blitzkrieg" at any moment.²⁴⁹ On April 9, US Ambassador Bullitt reports from Paris to the State Department²⁵⁰

In Washington: "I

spoke briefly with Bonnet (the French Foreign Minister) last night. He asked me to inform my government that it was five minutes to midnight. War could break out at any moment."

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²⁴⁸ STADER TAGEBLATT of August 14, 1939; Note of April

²⁴⁹ 5, 1939, see Tansill, page 554; US State Department

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²⁵¹ Tansill, page 558

Two days later, Bullitt reported to Washington on a conversation with French Prime Minister Daladier. He wrote that Daladier believed Hitler and Mussolini would “probably go to war in one or two weeks.”²⁵² At that time, the Reich government was still trying to reach a negotiated solution to the Danzig and Corridor issues.

August brings no improvement in the situation. The German Reich maintains its well-known demands on Poland. The Poles reject any agreement to their detriment regarding Danzig and the transit routes. The British and French attempt to draw the Russians into the war against Germany before Germany, in turn, obligates the Russians to neutrality in the coming conflict. Meanwhile, the background noise from Danzig and Poland grows increasingly shrill.

On August 16, England's ambassador Henderson, speaking from Berlin, once again attempted to urge reason and moderation. He sent a telegram to Foreign Secretary Halifax, writing: *"I would personally recommend suggesting*

to the Polish government—and indeed suggesting immediately—that its ambassador here be instructed to take some diplomatic step, which should be easy for him through Göring. ... Lipski is, despite everything that has happened, still persona grata here." The Poles could propose returning to the state of negotiations before March ... in order to make it possible to resume talks." Two telegrams the following day from Halifax to Kennard, the English ambassador in Warsaw, showed no reaction to Henderson's recommendation.

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In the final week before the outbreak of war, Polish anti-aircraft batteries made several attempts to shoot down Lufthansa passenger planes flying from Berlin to Königsberg over the Baltic Sea. Numerous shootouts occurred at border crossings between Polish and German customs officials and soldiers, resulting in many deaths. The burning of German farms in the Polish border region continued unabated. In August, the Polish attacks and arson spread to the German side of the border. Completely unnecessarily, the Security Service of the Reichsführer SS (SD) staged fake arson and bomb attacks on both sides of the border in the days leading up to the war, intending to exploit them for propaganda purposes.²⁵⁵ These illegal activities of the SD would have been inappropriate given the sheer number of Polish attacks already occurring.

²⁵² Tansill, page 558;

²⁵³ Desired Person;

²⁵⁴ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 35; Rasmus, pages

²⁵⁵ 92f and 357

It was not necessary to incite foreign powers against Poland or to create a further pretext for the German invasion of Poland. The population on the German side viewed the stream of refugees, the shootings, and the attacks on German farmers across the border with growing horror. They expected the violence to soon be brought to an end. On August 31, the day before the outbreak of war, Poles in Krakow also murdered the German consul there. Even without war, the German-Polish border was ablaze in August 1939.

Public opinion in the German Reich on Danzig, War and Poland

Public opinion in Germany regarding its eastern neighbor, the territories lost after the war, and a potential conflict over Danzig, West Prussia, and Upper Silesia was naturally quite different before the Second World War than it was after the catastrophe of the war lost in 1945. Before 1939, approval or disapproval of German foreign policy toward Poland was essentially shaped by the general views held by the majority of the population at that time regarding the policies of the dictator Hitler. The journalist Sebastian Haffner, who emigrated to England in 1938, aptly describes this in his postwar book "Notes on Hitler" as follows:²⁵⁶

"Hitler's 'positive achievements' have, at that time, instilled in Germany's population—regardless of whether they belonged to the working class or the bourgeoisie, and regardless of their previous affiliations with the KPD, SPD, Center Party, or anyone else—a 'Hitler support and belief in the Führer' that leaves virtually no room for healthy criticism. The list of Hitler's achievements is now long and impressive."

He is credited with an economic miracle without inflation amidst a prolonged global depression. "Out of abject poverty and mass misery," as Sebastian Haffner put it, "a modest and comfortable prosperity had generally emerged. The punitive measures of Versailles were largely lifted. The Saarland and the Memel Territory were once again part of the Reich, as were the Austrians, who had themselves demanded annexation in two plebiscites, and the Sudeten Germans. Miraculously, war was averted as a result. Thus, the German population, with regard to the Hitler era up to the outbreak of war, was accustomed to success and full of confidence. The negative side of the record, however, included the persecution of political dissidents and the crimes against minorities."

²⁵⁶ Haffner, pages 37 ff

"Foreign origins are not so clearly evident and are not considered so serious as to diminish successes and trust." This is how Haffner's "Remarks on Hitler" describe it. With this account, the emigrant Haffner portrays how interested citizens in 1939 perceived, viewed, and evaluated the situation in their own country and the position of the German Reich in the world. This helps answer the question of why the German people accepted the foreign policy that led to the outbreak of war as readily as they did in the late summer of 1939. Haffner resists the temptation to incorporate his postwar knowledge of the course and end of this war into his analysis of the people of 1939. He describes solely what people in Germany thought **at that time** .

In the generally positive atmosphere of the time, the German people followed their leading politician on the path to the great catastrophe we now call the Second World War. For the average German citizen of 1939, the outbreak of this new war was initially just the final, outstanding step in ending the unjustified sanctions and violations of international law committed at Versailles. This final step was intended to liberate their fellow Germans, who had been forced to live under Polish rule for 20 years.

That this step towards the final overcoming of Versailles was also the first in a completely different direction, leading first to a new world war and then, in 1945, to another defeat, could not have been known at the time. The fact that, despite this, quite a few people harbored anxious premonitions as early as 1939 does not mean that they knew with certainty what would ultimately develop from the conflict with Poland.

Until 1939, entirely different factors influenced public opinion than from the beginning of the war. First, there were Hitler's speeches, in which the "Führer" repeatedly and suggestively emphasized his desire for peace. He stated so often, in a way that made people believe him, that he knew the suffering of war from his own bitter experience and that he wanted to serve peace in Europe. Second, despite all the bluffing that could already be seen in Hitler at that time, his foreign policy was bolstered by the fact that he managed to avoid war and bloodshed throughout the entire process, from the annexation of the Saar region and the occupation of the Rhineland to the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland, and even the unlawful occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia.

Thirdly, the population certainly registered, in the context of the then-pending Danzig question, that Hitler, as the first post-war chancellor, renounced the return of West Prussia-Pomerelia and the correction of the borders within Upper Silesia, and that Posen was no longer an issue for him.

The German Reich could have asserted its interests in the parts of West Prussia and Upper Silesia that were predominantly German-influenced and inhabited until 1919, based on the right of self-determination of peoples recognized since 1918. The self-imposed limitation to Danzig, which Adolf Hitler apparently imposed on himself vis-à-vis the Polish government, and the certainty that

The fact that Danzig is German and not at all Polish leads people throughout Germany to believe that Hitler is fighting with Poland for a completely just cause.

The fourth factor influencing public opinion in 1939 regarding Hitler's stance toward Poland was the public's level of information about the situation in Danzig and the traffic problems on the transit routes to the annexed East Prussia. Everyone in Germany knew that Danzig had become a semi-autonomous territory under the supervision of the League of Nations and was not part of the state of Poland. Everyone knew that the people of Danzig had repeatedly demanded plebiscites in recent years and that they wanted to be annexed to their "own" country. Everyone was aware that Poland itself laid claim to the semi-autonomous Free State and had threatened war should Danzig be annexed by the Reich. Everyone knew the reports of the conditions on the transit routes through the Polish Corridor: sealed trains, customs harassment, gunfire on passenger trains, and attempts by Polish anti-aircraft batteries to shoot down Lufthansa planes.

What appears even worse than Danzig, and is fifth in importance, is the oppression of the German minority in Poland. The fate of the Germans who remained in the ceded territories and did not emigrate is similar to that of the Kosovo Albanians in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Just as the Free World in 1999 believed it could no longer stand idly by and witness the suffering and persecution of the Kosovars, and therefore began a war against Serbia, so too did the majority of the German population in 1939 believe it could no longer tolerate the suffering of its compatriots in Poland. Thus, they followed Hitler into war with trepidation, but also with faith in the "just cause."

A sixth reason for the population's solidarity with Hitler at the outbreak of war was the image they had of foreign countries. The so-called Peace of Versailles stood in stark contrast to the moderate peace treaties negotiated by Germany over the previous hundred years. The terms of the peace treaties in 1815 with France, 1866 with Austria, and 1872 again with France were negotiated, not dictated. None of the defeated countries was ever disarmed or plundered. None was subsequently assigned sole blame for the outbreak of war as if by a verdict. None of the defeated nations were stripped of their collective honor after defeat. After the First World War, the Germans were still quite familiar with the details of the events leading up to that war. They judge Versailles to be what, to the best of their knowledge, it undoubtedly is: an act of revenge by France, the enrichment of England, the naivety of America, and a Judas reward for formerly allied Italy; overall, a relapse into the age of barbarism.

Given this history, Great Britain and France were no longer powers that Germans could trust in 1939. If Hitler had often unwisely offended England and France before the war, he didn't have to face criticism.

They expect broad segments of the population in their own country. It is mostly only diplomats, politicians, and high-ranking officers who see where all this can lead.

A seventh factor is certainly the experience of the years since the war. Neither the victors nor the League of Nations extended a hand of reconciliation to the defeated Germans. Many victorious powers, instead, failed to uphold their disarmament obligations under Versailles. Moreover, during the period when Germany was virtually militarily defenseless, France established a network of military treaties with Germany's neighboring states around the Reich. In the pre-Hitler era, England, France, and America did not grant the democratically legitimized Reich governments a single territorial concession that could have made the postwar order of Versailles palatable to the Germans.²⁵⁷ Against this backdrop, Hitler's brutal methods initially appeared attractive. Thus, it is not surprising that in Germany in 1939, and particularly in the case of Danzig, self-help was considered a legitimate and acceptable form of interaction between states. What seems so brutal from today's perspective was, for the people in the 1930s, simply the consistent enforcement of the right to self-determination, which is due to Germans just as it is to all other peoples.

This German perspective was, incidentally, not entirely incomprehensible to astute Britons at the time. For example, England's ambassador to Berlin, Sir Henderson, wrote with obvious regret soon after the outbreak of war:

"Unfortunately, Nazi Germany's post-war experience had taught it that nothing could be achieved without violence or the threat of violence-could reach." ²⁵⁸

Almost no one in the German Reich wanted another war in 1939. The horrors of the past were far from forgotten. Yet almost everyone wanted the unresolved problems with Poland to be settled soon. The majority of Germans initially placed their hopes on the German-Polish negotiations and then on Hitler's method of threatening military force. When these efforts failed and Hitler gave the order to attack Poland, the majority of citizens accepted this new war, which they had hoped until the very end would be avoided.

Poland's self-assessment on the eve of the war

Backed by British and French guarantees and confident in the promised major French offensive against Germany in the event of war, the Polish leadership lulled itself into a false sense of security in the spring and summer of 1939. From the Polish perspective, Germany was trapped between approximately 120 French and additional British divisions.

²⁵⁷ Even the premature withdrawal of the occupying troops in 1930 was bought with the German assurance. They would have to pay reparations by 1988.

²⁵⁸ Henderson, page 197

In the west, the strong British navy on the seas and 45 Polish divisions in the east. Foreign Minister Beck, and apparently the majority of the government with him, are under the illusion that the Polish armed forces are superior to the Wehrmacht and that they will defeat it in cooperation with the British and French.

Immediately following the English and French promises of guarantees and assistance, Ambassador von Moltke reported on the Polish views on this matter.
Topic from Warsaw to Berlin:

"This self-confidence and overestimation of its own military strength, as expressed in the press, poses a danger to the Polish national character. That this is not merely press propaganda is demonstrated by a documented statement made by Deputy War Minister Gluchowski in a serious conversation, in which he explained that the German Wehrmacht was a great bluff, because Germany lacked the trained reserves to replenish its units. When asked whether he believed that Poland was seriously superior to Germany, Gluchowski replied: 'But of course.'" Gluchowski is not alone in this assessment of Poland's strength. On the 15th...

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In May 1939, during Polish-French military negotiations in Paris, members of the French delegation asked the Polish Minister of War, General Kasprzycki, whether the Polish border fortifications would withstand a German attack. He replied confidently:

"We have no fortifications, because we intend to wage a war of movement and invade Germany at the very start of operations."

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Two weeks before the start of the war, French Foreign Minister Bonnet warned the Polish ambassador, Count Łukasiewicz, of the strength of the German Wehrmacht. Łukasiewicz also dismissed Bonnet's fears, remarking: *"On the contrary, the Polish army will invade Germany from the very first day."*²⁶¹

Rumors had apparently spread within Polish government circles about the Wehrmacht leadership's rejection of Hitler's attack plans. This, too, fueled confidence in victory in Poland. Eighteen hours before the start of the war, a Swedish mediator named Dahlems and a diplomat from the British embassy in Berlin attempted, practically at the last minute, to deliver another negotiating offer from Hitler to the Polish ambassador, Lipski. Lipski made it clear that he would not accept it and told the Briton:

²⁵⁹ Ambassador's report of March 28, 1939 from Warsaw, see ADAP, Series D, Volume VI, Document 115 and AA 1939 Volume 2, Document 210

²⁶⁰ Bonnet, page 224

²⁶¹ Bonnet, page 252

"that he had no reason whatsoever to be interested in notes or offers from the German side. He knew the situation in Germany well after his five and a half years as ambassador. ...He was convinced that in the event of war, unrest would break out in this country and the Polish troops would successfully march on Berlin."

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Even after August 23, the day the fateful German-Soviet treaty for Poland was signed, Polish Foreign Minister Beck still misjudged his country's situation. He viewed the pact as a desperate act by the Germans, who, in his opinion, were in a difficult position vis-à-vis the allied Poles, British, and French.²⁶³ Beck was influenced by the exaggerated self-portrayal of the Polish army, constrained by the population's agitated wartime mood, and so firmly entrenched by the anti-German stance of the Polish media that, through Polish fault, he now had no room for maneuver on the Danzig question. The few moderating voices that still existed in Poland went unheeded. On August 23 – this serves as an example – Count LubieŹski, the chief of staff to the Polish Foreign Minister, arrived in Berlin from Warsaw and attempted to defuse the looming crisis by portraying his minister as willing to make peace and negotiate, but currently unable to act. LubieŹski wanted to buy Beck time. His argument: *"Colonel Beck is fully aware of the situation. He by no means underestimates the strength of the German army, even though Marshal Rydz-ŹmigŹy constantly claims he will crush it in a new battle at Grunwald . He is also aware of the weakness of the French and British armies. Moreover, the détente that has occurred between Germany and the Soviet Union is a great concern to him."*

But you must also realize that national sentiment in Poland is inflamed to a frenzy, and no statesman can find the magic word today to calm these unleashed spirits..." Regrettably,

LubieŹski's mission remains ineffective. Beck draws no conclusions. He misses ²⁶⁵

the opportunity to exchange the status of the city of Danzig for the offered guarantee of Poland's post-war borders. The latter, after all, had been the goal of Polish foreign policy for over 20 years.

Thus, on the day before the start of the war in Poland, the majority of officers, diplomats, politicians and media employees believed more in the entry of Polish troops into Berlin than in the imminent conquest of the capital Warsaw by the Wehrmacht.

²⁶² Dahlems, page 110 and IMT Protocols, Volume IX, page 521

²⁶³ Rassinier, page 268

²⁶⁴ Historical Battle of Tannenberg 1410

²⁶⁵ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 433 f

The latest mediation proposals

August 1939 became a hot month in every respect. British, Poles, Russians, French, Italians, Germans, Americans, Belgians, Swedes, and the Holy See, depending on their interests, either stoked fires or hauled buckets of water; some for peace, others for the right of self-determination of their own people or for the preservation of their own possessions, and ultimately most for war.

The King of the Belgians, on behalf of the heads of many smaller states, appealed to the Germans and the Poles to reach an amicable agreement and preserve peace for Europe. The Holy Father's efforts in May to convene a peace conference among the feuding powers have already been described. The Italians immediately agreed. The British, the French, and the Poles declined, and Germany replied that it was probably pointless. In August, a series of further attempts at a conference followed. On August 8, the Swedish mediator Dahlems proposed a secret German-British-French-Italian meeting to discuss a peaceful settlement of the disputes.²⁶⁶ The German Reich, represented by Minister Göring, immediately agreed. England indicated that an English reply could not be expected for some time. At that time, the British and French were negotiating with the Soviets in Moscow to conclude a triple alliance against Germany. One can assume that London wanted to finalize the treaty with Moscow before initiating further talks with Berlin at that level. Thus, time and opportunity were wasted. On August 19th, the British-French-Russian negotiations failed. Then it was once again the British who wanted to negotiate with the German Reich government. This will be discussed later in this book.

On August 22, French Prime Minister Daladier asked US President Roosevelt to convene a world peace conference in Washington. France would agree, and Hitler would likely decline. This would at least settle "the moral question" of the dispute.²⁶⁷ The result of this proposal was not overwhelming. On August 24, Roosevelt sent a peace message to Hitler and Polish President Moscicki. Roosevelt asked them to "refrain from all aggression for a certain period" and to reach an understanding through direct negotiations.²⁶⁸ Hitler, who had been trying to do just that unsuccessfully for nine months, did not reply to Roosevelt. Moscicki wrote back that it was not Poland that wanted anything.²⁶⁹ There was no mention of Danzig or the requested extraterritorial transit routes.

²⁶⁶ Dahlems, page 48

²⁶⁷ Bavendamm, Roosevelt's Road to War, page 594

²⁶⁸ British War Bluebook, Documents 124 and 125

²⁶⁹ Rassiniér, page 276, quoted from the Polish White Paper, document 90

The last mediation proposal worth mentioning comes from Mussolini. On August 31, the day before the outbreak of war, the "Duce" invited the heads of government of Germany, Poland, France, and England to a peace conference on September 5. As the main topic of negotiation, he proposed reviewing the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles as the origin of the current crisis.²⁷⁰ This was the first proposal that addressed the root causes of the danger of war, but the proposal came too late. The conflict sown at Versailles should have been resolved in good time by those who had instigated it. Instead, France and Poland clung to the Versailles positions. England, with its guarantee for Poland, spoiled the last chance for the Poles to budge. And it was left to Hitler to gradually repair the damage caused by Versailles over several years until he had gained enough success, practice, and experience to dare to wage war against Poland.

On the day of Mussolini's proposal, German radio intelligence intercepted Polish Foreign Minister Beck's instruction to Lipski in Berlin not to accept the new German negotiating proposal. Thus, even this otherwise good proposal from Italy was already worthless to Hitler the moment he learned of it. By the time Hitler was informed of Mussolini's proposal, German troops were already advancing to their starting positions for the attack against Poland. There were less than nine hours left. After nine months of fruitless negotiations, Hitler was unwilling to continue stagnating.

He no longer responds to Mussolini's proposal. Too late.

At the end of numerous futile attempts to prevent the war over Danzig through appeals or mediation, only two states remained, grappling with the open question of whether Germany could resolve the dispute created at Versailles unilaterally. These were Great Britain and the German Reich. At the heart of the conflict lay Hitler's fatal decision to make Czechoslovakia a protectorate. This so outraged the British government that it was determined not to allow a similar event to happen again. Consequently, a guarantee was issued for Poland, which led the Warsaw government to declare any change to the status of the Free City of Danzig a *casus belli*. Thus, the Reich government could no longer reunite the German city of Danzig with Germany without triggering war with Poland.

War with Poland – even if only for Danzig – therefore means war with England. France is now merely playing the role of "loader." The question of "reunification with Danzig or not" has thus become the question of "war between Great Britain and the German Reich." And that is what matters most in the last week before the war.

²⁷⁰ Rassiner, page 296

The last week before the war

Adolf Hitler is determined to resolve the open Danzig question, the problem of East Prussia's transport connections to the Reich, and the protection of the German minority in Poland before winter, either through negotiations or –
If that proves impossible, the solution lies in war. The General Staff has repeatedly warned that a war with Poland would inevitably lead to war with England, France, and, if prolonged, even war with the USA, and that a two-front war is unwinnable for the Wehrmacht. However, they have also advised that, should war break out, military operations should not be conducted after World War II, given the prevailing climate and weather data.

September would likely be the start date.²⁷¹ The road and path conditions would soon become too difficult for the army and the flying weather too difficult for the air force in Eastern Europe. Thus, Hitler's decision was not unaffected by this date.

Wednesday, August 23, 1939

Nine days before the outbreak of war.
The sensation of the morning press worldwide is the news of German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop's flight to Moscow. It is reported that the German Reich government and the Soviet Union government have agreed to conclude a non-aggression pact. Prime Minister Chamberlain, who had just learned of the failure of British efforts in Moscow and Stalin's change of heart, immediately dispatches Ambassador Henderson with a letter to Hitler. Hitler first assures Henderson of his personal esteem, but then complains about Britain's stance towards Germany on the Danzig question: *"Germany made Poland a decent and fair offer:" "He (Hitler) sees no possibility of a negotiated settlement because he is convinced that the British government has no interest whatsoever in*
such an arrangement." Henderson replies: *"that the German offer was indeed made, but it had the character of a dictate."*

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Hitler gets to the heart of the matter and laments that England, "who wanted to be England's greatest friend," has made itself an enemy of him. He emphasizes,
"that Germany had never done anything to harm England, yet England still opposed Germany."

²⁷¹ v. Below, page 190.

²⁷² This and the following quotations are taken from the transcript of the conversation ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 200.

And regarding Gdansk and Poland,

"that England takes the position: better war than anything to Germany's advantage."

Henderson's reply

presents things in typical British fashion: *"we have only*

opposed the principle of force." Hitler threatens *"that he will intervene immediately at*

the slightest Polish attempt to take further action against Germans or against Danzig."

"I will take action at the next Polish provocation."

Since acts of violence against Germans in Poland are commonplace and incidents on Danzig's borders are not uncommon, Hitler is implying that Germany is poised to attack Poland. This concludes the conversation.

Hitler made it clear to Ambassador Henderson that he blamed England for the fact that negotiations with Poland were now pointless. And Henderson tried to make Hitler understand that war with Poland would lead to war with Great Britain, even though the Soviet Union was no longer on England's side.



Fig. 13: Sir Nevil Henderson, the British Ambassador to Berlin

Chamberlain's letter, which Henderson hands over to Hitler, once again emphasizes England's loyalty to Poland, but it also contains two offers.²⁷³ The first is a stalling tactic with little regard for the drama of the crisis. Chamberlain proposes suspending negotiations with Poland until German-Polish relations have cooled and calmed down. The second offer is meant to entice Hitler. The British Prime Minister holds out the prospect of later negotiations, which, parallel to the Danzig question, would "simultaneously address the

²⁷³ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII – Annex to Document 200

"We could regulate major future international relations, including those of interest to England and Germany." This is a veiled offer to use the settlement of the Polish issue to also rearrange Anglo-German relations. This is what Hitler has been trying to do since taking office.

Furthermore, Chamberlain's letter contains the very direct warning that a war between Great Britain and the German Reich would be a long war with many fronts. Tragically for the German people and many other nations, this is why

Hitler failed to grasp the magnitude of the warning and its consequences. Great Britain intended to, and would, escalate the war over a single Baltic Hanseatic city into a world war. It would mobilize its Dominions from Australia to India and Canada, reactivate its old alliance with the USA, and carry the war to Germany's broad flanks, from Norway in northern Europe to Greece in southern Europe.

Hitler was in a hurry to reply. By 6 p.m. that same day, he handed Henderson his reply to Chamberlain.²⁷⁴ He emphasized his desire for friendship with Great Britain, complained about Poland, and, with a reference to the responsibility for Versailles, passed the buck back to England.

"Germany," Hitler writes, "never sought conflicts with England and never interfered in English interests. On the contrary, it endeavored for years – albeit unfortunately in vain – to gain English friendship."

That was Hitler's response to the offer of comprehensive negotiations. He then turned to Poland and continued:

"Germany was prepared to resolve the Danzig question and the corridor issue through a truly uniquely generous proposal via negotiations."

He argues that England sabotaged this offer by stirring up sentiment against Germany and by issuing a guarantee to the Poles. Germany will no longer tolerate pressure and ultimatums against the German minority in Poland and against the city of Danzig.

"Regardless, the issues of the corridor and of Gdansk must and will find their solution." The letter ends with the sentences:

"The question of how to deal with European problems peacefully cannot be decided by Germany, but primarily by those who, since the crime of the Treaty of Versailles, have persistently and consistently opposed any peaceful revision. ... I have fought for an Anglo-German friendship all my life, but have been disillusioned by the behavior of British diplomacy – we-

²⁷⁴ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 201

At least so far, I have been convinced of the futility of such an attempt. If this were to change in the future, no one could be happier than me.

Signed: Adolf Hitler

This initial exchange of notes in the last week before the war still offered hope for an understanding. Both heads of government assured each other that they wanted to avoid war. However, each pursued a dual strategy that was inherently contradictory. Chamberlain was only willing to accept a negotiated solution to the pending problems, but he had effectively blocked this route himself with his guarantee to the Poles. And Hitler wanted to avoid further inaction on the Danzig question, both in terms of rapprochement with England. This, too, was hardly compatible.

Hitler faced an "either-or" situation and prepared for both: negotiations and war. On the afternoon of August 23, he summoned his Wehrmacht adjutant, Colonel Schmundt, and ordered him to have the High Command of the Wehrmacht prepare for the attack on Poland at 4:30 a.m. on August 26.²⁷⁵ After the letter to Chamberlain and the meeting with Schmundt, Hitler sent a telegram to Daladier, the French Prime Minister. In it, he stated, among other things:

"I harbor no animosity whatsoever toward France. I personally renounced Alsace-Lorraine, and I have recognized the Franco-German border. I do not want a conflict with your country, and I only wish to maintain good relations with it. Therefore, the thought that I might have to fight France because of Poland is very difficult for me. Now, the Polish challenges have created a situation for the Reich that cannot continue. ... I will not attack France. But if it participates in the conflict, I will go to the end." Daladier's reply reached Hitler on August 27.

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The events of August 23rd also include Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop's Moscow negotiations with Stalin and Foreign Minister Molotov, and von Ribbentrop's telephone call to Hitler, in which he obtained the green light for the "Secret Additional Protocol." It was late that night before the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact bore the signatures of both sides.

Thursday, August 24, 1939

Eight days before the outbreak of war.

At 2 a.m., von Ribbentrop informed the "Führer" by telephone from Moscow of the signing of the treaty.²⁷⁷ Hitler now regained hope that

²⁷⁵ v. Below, page 182

²⁷⁶ Bonnet, page 274

²⁷⁷ v. Below, page 183

England is reconsidering its role in supporting Poland in light of the new situation, and Poland will also be more willing to negotiate over Danzig.²⁷⁸

Just as in England and France there were forces on the one hand that would welcome a concession from the Polish government, and others that preferred to halt German expansion through war, so too in Germany, close to Hitler, were there men who wanted to prevent war as well as those who were pushing for a reckoning with the Poles. In Berlin, it was none other than the Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, who was apparently prepared to risk a military solution. Working against him were his State Secretary, von Weizsäcker, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, Marshal Göring. The Marshal, who was also Minister of Aviation and President of the Reichstag, had the same access to the "Führer" as von Ribbentrop.

As Göring reads the letters from Chamberlain and Hitler, he gains hope for a way out of the now Anglo-German conflict over the Danzig-Poland question. He sees a real chance of preventing war as the outcome of this crisis. But Göring also sees that von Ribbentrop is pushing Hitler toward war rather than restraining him. Thus, Göring tries to circumvent the Foreign Minister. He uses his own contacts in England and the Swedish intermediary, the industrialist Dahlems, who had attempted to arrange an Anglo-German-Italian-French crisis conference on August 8th.



Fig. 14: The Swedish peace mediator Birger Dahlems

²⁷⁸ v. Weizsäcker Memoirs, page 253

The Marshal summons the Swede to Berlin, explains to him the now dire situation, regrets that the four-power conference he had proposed had not materialized, and asks him to fly to London the following day and convey to the British government that the German government wishes to reach an Anglo-German understanding. Göring assures him that he will use all the influence he has in the government to ensure that such an understanding is achieved.²⁷⁹

Meanwhile, in London, Prime Minister Chamberlain is giving a speech to the House of Commons.²⁸⁰ He reaffirms Britain's commitment to the Polish alliance. He laments that the German government, instead of calmly discussing the customs inspectors' dispute in Danzig, instead of negotiating the fate of the German minority in Poland, and instead of addressing all other differences, is now uncompromisingly demanding Danzig, while *"in Poland they were and always are ready to resolve the*

*differences with
to discuss Germany."*

Chamberlain also rejected Hitler's request to recognize Eastern Europe as a German sphere of interest, pointing out that England stood for the freedom and independence of peoples.

The speech is just as understandable from a British perspective as it appears hypocritical from a German perspective at the time. Poland is now just as uncompromising on the Danzig issue as the German Reich. And Great Britain maintains its own spheres of influence in the Middle East and Africa. It cares little about the freedom and independence of the peoples it holds in colonial hands, from India to Nigeria. Nevertheless, the speech does not create any new obstacles.

Ambassador Henderson evidently assessed the Polish government's behavior differently than his head of government in London. Late in the morning, he telegraphed the Foreign Office, summarizing his assessment of his last two meetings with the German Chancellor: *"With the treaty with Russia in hand," Henderson wrote, "the initiative now lies with*

*Hitler. I now expect an ultimatum to Poland. Negotiating with Hitler is now virtually impossible. ... It was devastating because I was of the opinion from the beginning that the Poles had acted extremely stupidly and unwisely. And so it is now. Perhaps Providence believes that we must learn through war not to do such a thing again."*²⁸¹

Around noon, Hitler was presented with a report from the Reich Press Chief stating that the signing of an Anglo-Polish mutual assistance treaty was expected that very day. This dashed, for the time being, Hitler's hopes that the German-Soviet agreement of the previous night would have persuaded the British to agree to such a treaty.

²⁷⁹ Rassinier, page 277

²⁸⁰ British War Bluebook, Document 64

²⁸¹ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 257

He might be persuaded to advise the Poles to compromise on the Danzig question.²⁸² He summons General Keitel, the Chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces, and asks him whether the attack against Poland can still be halted and postponed.²⁸³ He must – according to Hitler – “gain time for further negotiations.” An immediate inquiry with the army confirms that this is possible, and Hitler orders the attack postponed to an unknown date. On this day, August 24, the “Führer” evidently still prefers a “solution without bloodshed.”

Throughout the day, the governments in London and Warsaw exchanged information extensively. England's ambassador to Warsaw, Sir Kennard, telegraphed London that the German complaints about alleged mistreatment of minority members were distortions of the facts and exaggerations.²⁸⁴ For example, not 76,000 Germans had fled illegally from Poland, but at most 17,000. And Kennard complained about the very high number of attacks against members of the Polish minority in Germany. It is unclear to what extent Kennard's account was believed in London, given the earlier debates in the House of Commons about the terrorizing of the Ukrainian and German minorities in the new Poland.

In Paris, efforts are now being made to achieve peace in their own way.

"The French government strongly advises the Polish government to refrain from any military reaction and to respond with diplomatic action should the Danzig Senate itself declare Danzig's annexation to the German Reich."

What is surprising is that France does not introduce this²⁸⁵ "self-annexation" as an idea and compromise into the German-English-Polish debate. Rather, it seems as if the French government, in this highly tense situation, prefers to wait until Germany itself seizes Danzig and assumes the blame for the war.

In Washington, everything remains unchanged with Roosevelt's policy of quarantining Germany, even though the "Hitler-Stalin Pact" of the previous night has altered Poland's situation at a stroke. Early that morning, the German diplomat Herwarth von Bittenfeld reveals to an American colleague in Moscow the contents of the secret supplementary agreement, barely six hours old, which divides Eastern Europe into a Russian sphere of influence and a German one. The dividing line also divides Poland. At noon, Ambassador Steinhardt cabled the contents of the secret supplementary protocol to the State Department in Washington.²⁸⁶ Only a short time later, President Roosevelt and his Secretary of State

²⁸² v. Weizsäcker Memoirs, page 254; Keitel,

²⁸³ pages 248 f; British

²⁸⁴ War Bluebook, Document 52; Bonnet,

²⁸⁵ page 273 and French Yellow Book, Document 222; Bavendamm,

²⁸⁶ Roosevelt's Road to War, page 592; and Rassinier, page 340. A facsimile of the Steinhardt-Telegramm contains Maser, pages 63 and 64

Hull received the breaking news, and with it the danger that Poland now faced from Russia. Neither Roosevelt nor Hull did anything to warn Warsaw, London, and Paris. Instead, that evening the president sent a message to the governments in Warsaw and Berlin, urging them to find a solution to the German-Polish problems through peaceful negotiations. A warning that same day might have persuaded the Poles to accept Hitler's proposal of April 28. Hitler's final offer was a free port and economic privileges in Danzig, recognition of Poland's 1920 territorial gains in Posen, West Prussia, and southeastern Upper Silesia, and a 25-year peace treaty in exchange for extraterritorial access through the Polish Corridor and Danzig, which, in any case, was not Polish but still a League of Nations mandate. A warning to the British might have prevented the guarantee treaty for Poland, which was signed that day. But for Roosevelt, what is important is that Hitler gets caught up in the Danzig dispute, and obviously of lesser importance whether Poland survives.

Roosevelt remains silent, as he does two years later before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Poland's contribution that day was to close Danzig's outer borders at 11 a.m. The resulting supply difficulties in the city further fueled the desire of Danzig's residents for a swift annexation.

Friday, August 25th

Seven days before the outbreak of war.

Hitler still hopes that the Polish government will relent at the last minute.

He has postponed the Wehrmacht's attack against Poland indefinitely. Around 8 a.m., the Swedish mediator Dahlems, acting on Marshal Göring's orders, departs from Berlin-Tempelhof to London in a special aircraft. In the afternoon, he manages to reach Foreign Minister Halifax and deliver Göring's message.

In Berlin, one piece of news is chasing the next, none of it exactly pleasant for the "Führer." First, the night reports from the German-Polish borders flutter onto his desk.²⁸⁷ These are the reports of clashes and raids by both sides. German farms are still being burned down on the Polish side of the border. German assault troops retaliate for the arson on the other side that same night. The flow of refugees also continues. Polish border troops are attempting to drive the German refugee groups away from the border with rifle and machine-gun fire.

²⁸⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 383 ff. The German reprisals reappear the following day in a protest note from the Polish government to the Reich government: ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 330

to push back the border. German infantry is advancing into Polish territory and attempting to free the fleeing people. Nevertheless, eight people were shot dead while trying to escape last night. Moreover, another civilian passenger plane en route to Königsberg was fired upon by Polish anti-aircraft guns over the Baltic Sea. Hitler is outraged. He spontaneously writes to Mussolini, attempting—without explicitly stating it—to secure his support in the dispute with Poland: *“Germany’s relationship with Poland,” Hitler writes, “has been unsatisfactory since the spring, not through the fault of the Reich, but primarily due to the actions of England, and has been simply unbearable in recent weeks. The reports of the persecution of Germans in this region are not fabricated press reports, but only a fraction of a shocking truth. ... The Polish government’s claim that it is not responsible for the inhumane events, for the numerous border incidents (21 Polish border crossings last night alone), for the shooting down of German passenger planes ... only proves that it no longer has control over the soldiery it has whipped up. ... Under these circumstances, no one can predict what the next hour will bring. ...”*

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Hardly had the letter to Mussolini been sent when Hitler received an advance report from the German embassy in London.²⁸⁹ This included an analysis of the two speeches given by Chamberlain and Halifax before the House of Commons and the House of Lords the day before, a snapshot of public opinion, the first evaluation of the morning press, and confirmation of the signing of the Anglo-Polish mutual assistance pact.

Hitler learns from the report that, according to the embassy’s assessment, the English people are clearly united behind the government and that parties from left to right, as well as the press, consider the guarantee for Poland a “non-negotiable point of honor.” The report, however, emphasizes that Chamberlain and Halifax, in both speeches, avoided anything that could further aggravate the current situation. This assessment from London casts doubt on Hitler’s previous confidence that England might ultimately abandon Poland.

The prospect of going to war with England over Danzig and the transit routes contradicted all of Hitler’s assurances to the General Staff that he would know how to prevent it. It also clashed with his strategic vision of future Anglo-German cooperation and friendship. Thus, on the morning of August 25th, Hitler decided to further postpone the attack against Poland and to make England another offer. He rescheduled the attack, originally planned for the following day, once again.

²⁸⁸ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document

²⁸⁹ 266; ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 287, received in Berlin by telephone on August 25, in writing on August 26

Postpone indefinitely.²⁹⁰ The explanation given to Keitel is the same as the day before: "I need time to negotiate." Then he summons the English ambassador, Henderson, to the Reich Chancellery.

At 1:30 p.m., the two men stood facing each other. Hitler spoke—according to Henderson's notes—"in a serious voice and with all signs of sincerity."²⁹¹ He picked up where they had left off in their last conversation, in which Henderson had expressed hope for an Anglo-German understanding, and promised a large, comprehensive alliance with England once the German-Polish problem had been resolved.²⁹² Hitler then complained about the 21 border incidents of the previous night and assured Henderson that he would no longer tolerate such "Macedonian conditions" on Germany's eastern border. He expressed his regret that this dispute with Poland would lead to war with England. Immediately after the resolution of the German-Polish question, he would submit a treaty offer to the British government, guaranteeing the status quo of the British Empire, assuring German aid wherever such aid was needed, reaffirming the finality of Germany's western border, and expressing his desire to peacefully negotiate limited colonial demands. On the matter at hand, Hitler remained firm. He said:

"The problem of Danzig and the Corridor must be solved." And he adds: "If the British government were to consider these ideas, it could be a blessing for Germany and also for the British Empire. If it rejects these ideas, there will be war."

Henderson insisted on England's alliance with Poland and countered that the German offer of an alliance could only be considered after the Polish question had been resolved through negotiations. Hitler retorted that he had been trying for six months to resolve the Danzig question in talks with the Polish government, that he had invited Foreign Minister Beck to these talks several times, and that Beck had always declined.

After Henderson left, Hitler evidently had doubts that he had been able to convince the Englishman. He put his demands down again in six points and immediately sent them to Henderson at the embassy. In point two of the list, Hitler struck a tone that had been absent until then. He asked Great Britain to help with the recapture of Danzig and the Polish Corridor.²⁹³ The ball was now in England's court; they could either mediate or urge Poland to agree to the moderate German demands.

²⁹⁰ Keitel, page 249

²⁹¹ British War Bluebook, Document 69

²⁹² The key points from the conversation are taken from the AA files: ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 265 and the British War Bluebook, Document 69

²⁹³ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 515 f

The doubts that crept over Hitler that day didn't just concern England's position. Italy had meanwhile communicated, piecemeal in several notes, that it would not participate in a German war against Poland. Hitler had initially factored in that Italy would be able to tie down Poland's ally, France. That morning, the "Führer" finally realized that Italy could no longer be counted on in this regard. Hitler was familiar with the Italian-French and the Franco-British channels of communication, and he knew that news of Italy's rebuff to Germany would reach London just as quickly as it did Berlin. Hitler had lost another trump card, and England had gained one. This gave the British government one less reason to recommend that the Polish government compromise on the Danzig question. Thus, the option of attack became more likely for Hitler than a negotiated solution. He summoned Generals von Brauchitsch, Keitel, and Halder to the Reich Chancellery and decided around 3 p.m. that Poland would be attacked on August 31 if no other solution was found by then.²⁹⁴ The final decision was therefore not scheduled until 5 p.m. on August 30.

Hitler needs time to negotiate, but on the other hand, he must not lose sight of September 2nd as the last possible day for a military attack.

Time is running out.

At 5:30 p.m., the French ambassador, Coulondre, reported to Hitler. Hitler, still very tense from the day's news, approached Coulondre and opened the conversation:

"Given the seriousness of the situation, I wish to make a statement which I ask you to convey to Mr. Daladier²⁹⁵."

As I have already told him, I harbor no hostile feelings toward France. I personally renounced Alsace-Lorraine and recognized the Franco-German border. I do not want a conflict with their country. ... Consequently, the thought that I might have to fight France because of Poland is extremely painful for me. However, the Polish challenges have created a situation for the Reich that can no longer continue.

Several months ago, when I demanded the return of Danzig and a narrow strip of territory to connect it with East Prussia, I made exceptionally reasonable proposals to Poland. ... The Polish government not only rejected my proposals, but also subjected the German minorities to the worst forms of mistreatment. ... France would tolerate such a thing no more than Germany. These matters have gone on long enough, and on new occasions

²⁹⁴ Keitel, page

²⁹⁵ 250, French Prime Minister

I will respond to challenges with force. I want to emphasize this again: I wish to avoid a conflict with your country. I will not attack France, but if it intervenes in the conflict, I will go all the way. ... Please tell Mr. Daladier this from me.

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Ambassador Coulondre replied: "Now

that every misunderstanding has been cleared up, I feel it is important to give you my word of honor as a soldier that France will stand by Poland with its armed forces should it be attacked. I can also give you my word of honor that the government of the French Republic will do everything in its power to preserve peace until the very last moment. It will not fail to warn the Polish government of the need for caution." Hitler retorted vehemently: "Why, indeed why, did you give Poland a blank check then?"

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Now the Frenchman reveals the real reason for the war on whose brink the world stands these days: "This is the result of the events of March 15th. The

occupation of Prague made a deep impression on the minds in France. It created a feeling of insecurity everywhere, which prompted France to strengthen its alliances."

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Hitler had to recognize here – and actually had long since – that he was now being presented with the bill for the unlawful occupation of the rest of Czechia.

The bill also includes unspoken items: • The denunciation of Versailles,

• the annexation of German-Austria, • the

heresy of the authoritarian form of government, •

the increase in the Reich's power over the past six

years, • the rearmament of the Wehrmacht, • Hitler's demand for the return of

the former German colonies, and • the

German will to rise to the top in East Central Europe.

This is no longer solely about Danzig and transit routes, that is, about the issues on which England has historically shared the German views. For Great Britain and France, Danzig is now the obstacle before which they intend to halt or bring down the German Reich.

Following his conversation with Coulondre, Mussolini's reply to Hitler's letter from that same morning arrives. The "Duce" conveys his full understanding to the "Führer"—

²⁹⁶ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 396 f and French Yellow Book, Document 242

²⁹⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 397 and French Yellow Book, Document 242

²⁹⁸ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 397 and French Yellow Book, Document 242

Hitler agrees with the German attitude towards Poland and acknowledges that such a tense situation cannot last indefinitely. But he also writes that Italy is not ready for war and, regrettably, cannot participate in conflicts with Poland and its allies.²⁹⁹ Hitler is dismayed. Italy refuses its support. England continues to strengthen the Poles instead of urging them to the negotiating table, and France is firmly resolved to go to war on Poland's side.

Many telegrams also went back and forth between the British Embassy in Warsaw and the Foreign Office in London. At 1 a.m., Halifax, from London, urged Kennard in Warsaw to admonish the Poles "to refrain from any action that might place them in the role of aggressor."³⁰⁰ At 1:20 a.m., Kennard telegraphed back that the French ambassador had already conveyed this admonition to the Polish Foreign Minister, Beck, the previous night.³⁰¹ At 2:35 a.m., another telegram went to Halifax in London. Kennard reported that he had learned from Foreign Minister Beck that

Göring in Berlin attempted to discuss Poland's stance on the German proposals with Lipski. Beck evidently portrayed potential German-Polish talks as a breach of Poland's alliance with England. Kennard relays this view as if it were his own, writing in the 02.35 telegram that Göring tried to drive a wedge between England and Poland through Lipski.

"Mr. Beck believes," the report continues, "that the German government is making every effort to gain a free hand in the East through such methods, and he thinks it should be noted that Poland does not want to be drawn into such an intrigue."

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At 2 p.m., Kennard sends another assessment of the situation to Halifax. London:

"... I seriously doubt that it would be of any use if the Polish ambassador sought a meeting with Hitler. Although I cannot judge the situation from here, it seems to me that, according to Mr. Hitler's reply (letter of August 23, author's note), any such action would be seen as a sign of weakness and would provoke an ultimatum."

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Paris and London are worried that the war will be started by Poland rather than Germany. In Warsaw, German attempts at dialogue are seen as an intrigue, and Kennard shows no inclination to persuade the Poles to engage in talks with the Germans.

²⁹⁹ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document No.

³⁰⁰ 271 Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document

³⁰¹ 272 Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document

³⁰² 273 Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document

³⁰³ 263 Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 270

Meanwhile, the Swedish agent Dahlems is in London at

Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax was summoned.³⁰⁴ At about 6:30 p.m. – hours after the signing of the Polish-British Mutual Assistance Pact – Lord Halifax declared that he had been filled with hope since Henderson's visit to Hitler that morning. Although he had not yet received a detailed report on the outcome of this meeting, he hoped that the initiative to open official negotiations would lead to a peaceful solution. Halifax thanked Dahlems for his efforts and expressed his hope that he would no longer need his services.

Dahlems believed in a breakthrough and at 10:20 p.m. called Marshal Göring at the Reich Chancellery to report. Göring, according to Dahlems, seemed very nervous. He explained that he feared the outbreak of war at any moment. The Anglo-Polish treaty signed that morning, simultaneously with Henderson's visit to Hitler, was being interpreted by the "Führer" as an explicit declaration by England that it no longer desired a peaceful solution. That same night, Dahlems informed the head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office in London about the German Chancellor's impression of the treaty with Poland. The Chancellor expressed his surprise that the treaty was being misunderstood in Germany. Dahlems requested a new meeting in Halifax.

On this Friday, a week before the outbreak of war, the British government repeated its move of March 23rd. By signing the Anglo-Polish Protection Treaty, it reaffirmed its support for the Poles. The Chamberlain government intended to prevent Hitler from annexing Danzig to the German Reich without Anglo-Polish consent. However, it also had to be aware that with Warsaw's now even stronger stance, it was forcing Hitler to choose between relinquishing Danzig and the protection of the German minority in Poland, or waging war.

With the English signature on the British-Polish treaty today, Chamberlain is once again turning the key in the door to the conference room of the German-Polish negotiations.

Saturday, August 26th

Six days before the outbreak of war.

At 7:50 a.m., Ambassador Henderson flies to London to deliver Hitler's proposal to the British government.

At 11 a.m., Dahlems manages to speak to Foreign Minister Halifax again and report to him on the effect of the British-Polish treaty on Hitler.

Dahlems is able to convince the minister that Marshal Göring should be in this situation.

³⁰⁴ The following conversations are taken verbatim from Dahlerus's written account. See Dahlems, pages 54 f

At present, on the German side, he is the only influential figure who can still save the peace.³⁰⁵ The Swede asks Halifax to write a letter to Göring and confirm England's earnest desire for a peaceful solution. Dahlems returns to Germany with the requested letter and delivers it to Göring. Göring considers the message so important that he immediately goes to see Hitler and informs him of it. Meanwhile, it is midnight again.

The letter and Dahlem's verbal communication led Hitler to believe, for a time, that England was interested in a peaceful solution to the Danzig conflict, but would declare war on Germany's unilateral use of force. Furthermore, the Swede conveyed that Ambassador Henderson would arrive in Berlin the following morning with the official British government response to Hitler's six-point message.

Shortly after midnight (August 27), Hitler summoned Dahlems to the Reich Chancellery. The Swede now became the mediator between Hitler and the British, having previously acted as an intermediary between Göring and the British government. The conference, which lasted for over an hour and a half, became a dialogue between Hitler and Dahlems.³⁰⁶ Göring, who was also present, only intervened at the very end. It is noteworthy that Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, who had evidently given Hitler incorrect advice regarding England's reactions, was not consulted. Hitler described his own and Germany's situation as he saw it. This was followed by a dialogue in which Hitler questioned Dahlems about his experiences in England. Then the "Führer" launched into one of his monologues. He described the invincibility of the German army and air force. Dahlems, for his part, tried to make the German Chancellor understand that the German Reich could never win a naval war against the naval power of England. Finally, Hitler paced his room in a highly agitated manner before suddenly stopping and saying to the Swedish mediator: *"You, Mr. Dahlems, have heard my point. You must travel to England immediately to convey it to the British government. I do not believe that Henderson understood me, and I sincerely hope that an understanding can be reached."*

It is decided to define Hitler's position precisely. Dahlems memorizes it so he doesn't have to carry any compromising documents with him on the flight to London. There are again six points, some of which now go further than the six points Hitler gave Henderson:

"1. Germany desires an alliance with England that will eliminate all future disputes of a political or economic nature."

³⁰⁵ Dahlems, page

³⁰⁶ 56. The following conversation is taken from Dahlerus' account. See Dahlems, pages 61 ff.

This offer is therefore valid immediately and not only after the Danzig solution, as Hitler had previously proposed.

"2. England is requested to cooperate in ensuring that Germany receives Danzig and the corridor, with the exception of a free port in Danzig, which is to be available to Poland. Poland is to receive a corridor to the port city of Gdynia and to have full control over this city and a sufficiently large area around it."

The corridor now demands more than just extraterritorial transit routes. Since Poland has so far refused to accept Hitler's proposed minimal solution, he hopes, with England's backing, to also secure for Germany the non-Polish-populated part of the corridor.

Göring grabs an atlas, tears out a map sheet and marks with a red pen the territory that, according to the new wish, should become part of Germany.

"3. Germany commits to guaranteeing Poland's borders."

4. Germany desires an agreement on colonies, on the return of its former possessions or compensation.

5. Germany desires guarantees regarding the treatment of the German minority in Poland.

6. Germany undertakes to protect the British Empire with its armed forces wherever it might be attacked.

Dahlems agrees to present the new proposal in London as soon as possible. It is now morning when Hitler, Dahlems, and Göring part ways.

On the afternoon of August 26, after Halifax had dismissed Dahlems with the letter to Göring for Berlin, he received Count Raczynski, the Polish ambassador, and informed him about Henderson's talks with Hitler. He added that "Hitler has not given the slightest indication of what he considers the solution to the German-Polish problems."³⁰⁷ Hitler's proposed solution, however, had been on the table since October 24 of the previous year: Danzig and extraterritorial transit routes in exchange for a free port and trading privileges in Danzig for the Poles, border guarantees, and a peace treaty for 25 years.

Halifax obviously does not consider this a solution.

The French activities of August 26th should also be added. Early in the morning at 1 a.m., Ambassador Coulondre reported from the German capital to Paris. He introduced an entirely new proposal into the debate. Coulondre suggested carrying out a population exchange in all German-Polish border regions with mixed populations, instead of yielding to the German demand for Danzig.³⁰⁸ The proposal was sent to Warsaw that same day, where it received the approval of the Polish Foreign Minister.

³⁰⁷ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 390

³⁰⁸ Bonnet, page 274

On the same day, August 26, President Daladier received Hitler's letter in which he wrote that Germany would not initiate a war against France. Daladier and Foreign Minister Bonnet drafted a reply reiterating the three well-known positions: France's loyalty to Poland, its affirmation of its desire for peace, and its proposal to negotiate with Warsaw.³⁰⁹ It is astonishing that the Coulondre proposal involving a population exchange is not mentioned at all in this letter. Otherwise, the letter is hardly helpful. President Daladier indulges in a long series of assurances of peace, all of which essentially mean: "We French are peaceful, and whoever touches the status of Danzig is not." Five days before the war, the French government had no intention of reconsidering the German-Polish problem—the status of the Free City of Danzig—which it had helped create at Versailles, nor of inducing Poland to compromise on this issue.

On this day, in the East Prussian district of Neidenburg, a Polish cavalry unit was confronted by soldiers of a Königsberg artillery battery while conducting a raid through German villages. Forty-seven Poles fell to machine-gun fire from the battery, which was deployed there to protect the German border population.

Sunday, August 27th

Five days before the outbreak of war.

In London, the Cabinet is discussing Hitler's first proposal, formulated in six points. The central point of discussion is that the German Wehrmacht's expected invasion of Poland yesterday did not occur. This is seen as a retreat by Hitler from his own policy of intransigence,³¹⁰ rather than as a concession. As soon as Dahlem arrives in London, he is brought in. The gentlemen examine Hitler's offer point by point. It is then agreed that the Swedish mediator, in place of Henderson, will fly to Berlin with the English response to Hitler, who will immediately relay Hitler's reaction to it back to London so that the London government can then deliberate again.

And it is decided that Henderson will only follow Dahlem to Germany tomorrow with the cabinet's final and official response. This arrangement is accepted by Hitler over the phone, and Dahlem flies to Germany, where he is immediately received by Göring. It is now late evening again.

Göring considers the reply from London unfavorable in all respects and insists on presenting it to Hitler alone and convincing him in private of the benefits of London's response. The reply refers strictly to Hitler's points.³¹¹ Regarding point 1, it states that England is fundamentally prepared to

³⁰⁹ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 324 (French text) and AA 1939 2, Document 460 (German text)

³¹⁰ Rassinier, page 284

³¹¹ The following English answer is taken from Dahlems, page 78 f.

to conclude a treaty with Germany that would ensure peaceful political and economic development. Regarding point 2, the request for assistance in the recovery of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, the British government is favorably disposed toward a solution to the question and recommends direct negotiations between Berlin and Warsaw. On point 3, the German guarantee of Poland's future borders, the British government insists that Poland's future borders must be guaranteed not only by Germany, but also by Russia, Italy, France, and Great Britain. Regarding point 4, adequate guarantees for the German minority in Poland, the British government accepts Germany's demand and recommends that this issue also be resolved through direct negotiations with Poland. The British government initially rejects the German claim, raised in point 5, for the eventual return of former German colonies or for compensation, but indicates that negotiations on this matter are possible at a later date. The offer in point 6 to provide military support to the British Empire if necessary is likewise rejected.

Göring's doubts about Hitler's positive reaction are not entirely unfounded. Finally, the proposal to negotiate the Danzig and Polish Corridor issues between Germany and Poland hits the weak point of the German position. Foreign Minister Beck in Warsaw has not budged an inch on the Danzig transit question since October of last year. The British and French guarantees and promises of March and May, and of two days ago, have only reinforced Beck's resolve. The proposal to negotiate the minority question is also a mockery. Poland has denounced the minority protection provisions signed in the Treaty of Versailles and never enforced the two minority protection treaties with the German Reich within its own borders. What could possibly motivate the Poles now to change their stance regarding Danzig, the Corridor, and the minorities? Göring intends to use this response from the British government to dissuade Hitler from invading Poland.

When he reports to the "Führer" with the Chamberlain reply delivered by von Dahlem, it is almost midnight.

The Dahlem attempt to prevent the catastrophe was not the only one that day. In the afternoon, the chief of staff to Foreign Minister Beck, Count ŷubieŷski, arrived in Berlin and visited Dr. Kleist, chairman of the German-Polish Society and an official in the Foreign Office. ŷubieŷski succeeded in convincing Dr. Kleist that his boss in Warsaw was no longer "in charge" of the proceedings and that the Polish population, gripped by war fever for months, would not tolerate any compromise on Danzig at present. Beck, Count ŷubieŷski explained, had a realistic view of Poland's situation, but he needed time until conditions in Poland had cooled down and normalized.³¹² Dr. Kleist

³¹² Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 433 ff.

He immediately conveyed this view of things to von Ribbentrop, who then contacted Hitler that same day. It is quite remarkable that von Ribbentrop, who otherwise did not exert a moderating influence on Hitler, would here become an advocate for his Polish colleague. But even this small spark of hope for peace quickly faded in light of the consequences that this very sentiment, *stirred* up in Poland, had on Germany. After von Ribbentrop's brief presentation, Hitler replied: *"As I have already told Mr. Henderson, I readily believe that Beck*

And Lipski are full of good intentions. But they are no longer in control. They are prisoners of a public opinion that has been driven to a frenzy by their own propaganda and the boasts of the military. Even if they wanted to negotiate, they would be unable to do so. That is the real crux of the tragedy.

*Can you see it!"*³¹³

Hitler hands Ribbentrop a telegram that is lying on his desk:

"August 24, 1:15 p.m., Lufthansa airliner D-ABHF, 15 to 20 km away from the Hel coast at an altitude of 1500 m, was fired upon by Polish flak from a Polish ship located about 40 km off the coast.

Explosion clouds from eight shots were observed from the machine.

August 25, 12:47 p.m., Lufthansa passenger plane D-AHIH, 20 km from Heisternest, was fired upon by Polish anti-aircraft fire. The shots were so close that detonations were clearly heard inside the aircraft. State Secretary Stuckart was among the passengers. ...

August 25, 2:18 p.m. and 3:25 p.m., a naval seaplane from Pillau was shot down near Brösen at a considerable distance from the coast, the second time with six shots. Shots fired either from Heia or from the Polish ship." Hitler remarked on the three reports:

"If we ask the Warsaw government to apologize to us, they will, as usual, reply that they are not at fault. This is pure anarchy. What can you do?"

Ribbentrop's only recorded attempt to persuade Hitler to grant the Polish government more time was thus unsuccessful.

On the same day, the next report from Warsaw arrives in London. Ambassador Kennard shares his perspective: *"As far as I can tell, the German claims*

about the mass mistreatment of members of the German minority in Poland are gross exaggerations, if not outright fabrications. ..."

In any case, these are simply German provocations in connection with a policy that divides the two nations.

³¹³ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 433 ff.

has turned them against each other. I assume this is done to (a) (a) to incite war fever in Germany, (b) to impress public opinion abroad, and (c) to provoke either despondency or overt aggression in Poland. ... There is no indication that the civilian authorities have lost control of the situation in Poland. ..."

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Monday, August 28th

Four days before the outbreak of war.

Early morning, 1:30 a.m.: Göring returns from Hitler and has been successful with the Dahlerus message. Contrary to Göring's initial fears, Hitler has respected England's position. Despite the late hour, Göring immediately informs Dahlem of Hitler's comments on the reply delivered from London.

"With pleasure," wrote Marshal Göring, "Hitler welcomed England's desire to reach a peaceful agreement with Germany. The Reich Chancellor would place the utmost importance on forging a genuine alliance between Great Britain and Germany, and not merely a treaty. Hitler respected England's decision to uphold its guarantee for Poland, as well as England's demand for an international guarantee of Poland's borders by the five major powers. He also accepted the English proposal to settle the issues of the Polish Corridor and Danzig definitively through direct negotiations between Germany and Poland. Hitler further approved the English government's proposal to postpone the decision on the colonies until general demobilization and normalization of the situation. He also expressed his conviction that the English would do their utmost in the related negotiations to bring about a satisfactory solution."

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Peace seems to have been saved. Hitler's reaction reveals two things, after all. Firstly, he, who had repeatedly invited Beck to talks about Danzig and the transit routes since January 5th, wants to wait a little longer. Secondly, and even more remarkable, is his agreement to a guarantee of Poland's borders by England, France, Italy, and the Soviet Union. This agreement suggests that his interest in conquering neighboring Poland is relatively low. If he had nevertheless considered annexation in recent months, he is now at least prepared to respect Poland's existence in the long term, provided he can secure Great Britain's friendship.

³¹⁴ British War Bluebook, Document 55

³¹⁵ Dahlems, pages 82 f

Dahlems hurried to relay Hitler's and Göring's reactions to London as quickly as possible through the British Embassy in Berlin. He emphasized that Great Britain now had to convince Poland to begin negotiations with Germany immediately. Dahlems also conveyed that it was extremely important that the official reply, which Henderson was to deliver later, mention England's commitment to persuading the Polish government to enter into negotiations with Germany.³¹⁶ Around noon, Dahlems went once more to see Field Marshal Göring, who had meanwhile moved to his mobile headquarters west of Potsdam. There, the Swede met Luftwaffe Generals Milch, Jeschonnek, Udet, Bodenschatz, and State Secretary Körner, who apparently unanimously agreed that war had to be avoided.³¹⁷

Meanwhile, in London, the British government's official response to Hitler's six-point offer was being finalized. At 2 p.m., a telegram from Lord Halifax was sent to the British ambassador in Warsaw, Kennard, with instructions to immediately inquire of the Polish foreign minister whether the Polish government was prepared to enter into direct negotiations with the German government.³¹⁸ This telegram contained a move by London that would inevitably lead to war. Minister Halifax emphasized first and foremost in his instructions to Ambassador Kennard that London was making a clear distinction between the method of the proposed negotiations and the objectives of those negotiations. The indication of a willingness to negotiate on the Polish side would not be misinterpreted in any way as an acquiescence to Hitler's demands. The negotiations were to be conducted according to the principles of safeguarding Poland's essential interests and on a level playing field. Great Britain continued to stand behind Poland.

The telegram contains not a single word about Danzig and not the slightest hint at Warsaw's willingness to compromise with the Germans. The veiled message is that the British government will not misinterpret Poland's readiness to negotiate as a concession on the Danzig question, and that Warsaw should not do so either.

The expectation is that Poland will negotiate, and nothing more. Based on this message, London can be certain that Warsaw will stonewall regarding Gdansk.

The reply from Warsaw arrives at the Foreign Office at 4 p.m.:

"Foreign Minister Beck is extremely grateful for the proposed reply to Hitler and authorizes His Majesty's Government to inform the German government that Poland is ready to enter into direct negotiations immediately. "

to enter the Reich"

³¹⁶ Rassinier, page

³¹⁷ 285; Dahlems,

³¹⁸ page 85; British War Bluebook,

³¹⁹ Document 73; Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 420; and Rassinier, page 286

At 5 p.m., Ambassador Henderson departed for Berlin with the reply in his luggage. At 10:30 p.m., he was received at the Reich Chancellery with the honors usually reserved for heads of state. Such was Hitler's desire to underscore the importance he attached to the Anglo-German rapprochement.³²⁰ Before Henderson presented Chamberlain's reply, the two men exchanged views.³²¹ The ambassador emphasized England's loyalty to Poland and declared: *"The English people, and especially Mr. Chamberlain, desired an understanding with Germany, but in carrying out this intention they needed the cooperation of Germany, which would have to try to reach an agreement with the Poles by peaceful means."*

Hitler replied:

"that he was quite prepared to settle the outstanding issues with the Polish government on a very reasonable basis. ..."

Now, however, things had escalated to such an extent that new incidents and acts of violence against ethnic Germans were occurring daily. ... For him, the choice now lay in defending the rights of the German people or surrendering them at the price of an agreement with England. This was not a choice for him, but rather a duty to stand up for the rights of the German people." After about an hour's conversation, Hitler dismissed

Henderson with the assurance that he would carefully study Chamberlain's message and reply in writing the next day. Hitler was evidently initially satisfied with his first review of the letter from London. Dahlems, the Swedish mediator, was informed of this by telephone from the Reich Chancellery at 1:15 a.m. on Göring's instructions.

"that the answer would be highly satisfactory and that there was now great hope that the danger of war was over." On the same day, there was³²²

another glimmer of hope for the German side. Mussolini informed the Foreign Office that the German right to Danzig had to be recognized in principle, and that he would propose a conference of four or five nations to discuss all other issues, such as disarmament, the supply of raw materials for Germany, and the colonies.³²³

Tuesday, August 29th

Three days before the outbreak of war.

All of Europe is gripped by fever, yet during the day Berlin initially appears to be peaceful.

³²⁰ Rassinier, page 287

³²¹ The following conversation is recorded in ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 384

³²² IMT Interrogations, Volume IX, page 519

³²³ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 395

The High Command of the Soviet Armed Forces announces the reinforcement of troops on the western border.³²⁴ Mobilization preparations continue in England, Poland, Germany, France, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands; however, in Poland and Germany, these preparations are so far unofficial. Hungary is mobilizing against Romania, and vice versa. The borders between Italy and France and between France and Germany are being drawn by both

Pages closed. Italy puts its air force in Libya, Ethiopia, Sardinia, and Sicily on alert. The Egyptian Territorial Army is mobilized. Spain is putting its Pyrenean fortresses on high alert. In Turkey, conscription is underway, and the Dardanelles lines are being manned. In Belgium, reservists for 12 divisions have been called up, and in Switzerland, 100,000 men have been drafted for the border troops. And Ireland is challenging Great Britain's right to conscript Irish citizens living in England for military service.

Even the USA – although neutral – is already mobilizing in spirit. Early in the morning, at 7:10 a.m., the evening report from the German Embassy in Washington arrives in Berlin. Chargé d'Affaires Thomsen writes:

"In military circles, the mood towards Germany is significantly less influenced by press propaganda than in the wider public. In the latter, Germany is generally regarded as a disturber of the peace and an aggressor who refuses to solve political problems other than by force. ... I assess the situation as follows:"

1. Roosevelt considers neutrality reprehensible. ...

2. America will intervene militarily,

a. if England and France are in danger of defeat,

b. presumably also if there is a sure prospect of an Anglo-French final victory. ..." Around 11 a.m., Göring and ³²⁵

Dahlems meet again. The Marshal shakes the Swedish mediator's hand and says excitedly: "Peace will remain! Peace is secured."³²⁶

Meanwhile, the Reich Chancellery is carefully evaluating the reply from the British government. On the surface, the text of the letter matches the reply previously delivered by von Dahlem.

"England shares the desire for mutual understanding. The German-Polish agreements must safeguard Poland's essential interests."

³²⁴ The following mobilization measures are from the Archive of the Present, Volume 1939-1940 taken from pages 4193-1195

³²⁵ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 378

³²⁶ Dahlems, page 88 and IMT negotiations, Volume IX, page 519

*Poland's new borders must be guaranteed by five powers. The minority issues should only be negotiated after a period of calm."*³²⁷

Hitler apparently agrees with all of this. However, the letter also contains three passages where it is unclear whether Hitler, Göring, and von Ribbentrop understand what they are saying and what the consequences are. It reads:

"His Majesty's Government trusts that the Chancellor will not believe that His Majesty's Government, because it takes its obligations to Poland seriously, is therefore not striving to use its full influence to bring about a solution that satisfies both Germany and Poland."

Stripped of all clichés, the sentence reads:

"We hope that you do not believe that we will not work towards a solution that is also satisfactory for Germany."

The sentence can also be shortened as follows: *"We hope you don't think we're doing nothing for you."*

This, upon careful reading, is not a promise that the British government would work towards a solution satisfactory to Germany. And that is precisely what Hitler had asked Chamberlain for in his letter two days earlier. The sentence—brilliantly phrased—creates the impression of British support for the German cause, yet says absolutely nothing. The day before, the same British government had instructed Ambassador Kennard in Warsaw not to advise Polish Foreign Minister Beck of any concessions on the matter. Negotiations were to be the only option. Thus, the sentence quoted above, with its reference to "His Majesty's Government..." in the context of Kennard's instructions, is nothing more than a brilliantly formulated deception by Hitler; perhaps Prime Minister Chamberlain's revenge for Hitler's broken promise regarding Czechoslovakia.

The second questionable passage in this reply concerns Poland's willingness to negotiate. It states:

"His Majesty's Government has already received a definitive assurance from the Polish Government that it is prepared to enter into discussions on this basis."

This statement must make Hitler believe that the Polish government had, the day before, agreed to take action on the matter at England's urging.

But that is precisely what the Kennard directive sought to prevent. The core of the English advice to the Poles was: "Talking, yes; action is not required from our side," or, to put it metaphorically: "Go to the ball, but refrain from dancing." With this statement, the British government suggested a now open path to negotiation, which in reality it had blocked through Ambassador Kennard.

³²⁷ AA 1939, No. 2, Document 463 and ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 3 84 and Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 447

A third, and equally consequential, flaw in the response from London lies in the order of the conditions that are now to apply. Hitler has offered a friendship pact if England helps with the Danzig issue. The British government replies: if Germany and Poland resolve the Danzig dispute through negotiations, England is prepared to conclude a friendship pact. Hitler's condition for Germany's reconciliation with Poland is the friendship pact with England. Chamberlain's condition for the friendship pact with England is Germany's reconciliation with Poland. The British are thus still showing Hitler the closed door in Warsaw and saying, "Go through it." Hitler's calculation, or hope, is therefore not working out on this point either. Nevertheless, his long-term goal of reconciliation and a friendship pact with Great Britain is now more important to him than the immediate goal of Danzig. He agrees to Chamberlain's difficult conditions.

Hitler responded with a note in which he first accepted the conditions from London.³²⁸ He then reiterated his complaint about the persecution of ethnic Germans in Poland and declared that this situation could not be tolerated for another week or even a few more days. In this letter, Hitler demanded the revision of the Treaty of Versailles insofar as it concerned Danzig and the Polish Corridor, and otherwise assured the continued existence of the Polish state under the Five-Power Guarantee. To this extent, Hitler followed the directives of the British government. Only at the end of the letter did he erect an obstacle that the British and the Poles now had to overcome. He concluded his letter with the expectation that German-Polish negotiations would indeed commence within 29 hours: *"Under these circumstances, the German Reich government agrees to accept the proposed mediation of the Royal British Government for the dispatch of a Polish representative with full powers to Berlin. It anticipates*

the arrival of this representative on Wednesday, August 30, 1939." This means: negotiations should begin no later than midnight the following day, without any further Anglo-Polish stalling tactics. Hitler is now clearly wavering between hoping for the mediation skills of the London government and expecting that the Warsaw government will not budge.

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The German Chancellor is, in many respects, backed into a corner. He wants to see action from the British as quickly as possible, or find out if he is being strung along. He can no longer keep the mobilization and deployment of the Wehrmacht in limbo. Either the armed forces must be withdrawn in the foreseeable future, or they must invade Poland no later than September 2nd. Furthermore, Hitler wants to distance himself from the Polish and the

³²⁸ AA 1939 No. 2, Document 464 and ADAP, Series D, Volume VII,

³²⁹ Document 421

He must not allow the French press to report him as "weak knees" again, as they did three weeks ago. He must therefore soon balance the halt order for the assembled Wehrmacht with a successful negotiation. And, in this situation, probably crucially: he cannot leave the persecuted German minority in Poland without help for much longer.

At 7 p.m., Hitler handed his reply to Ambassador Henderson, who immediately skimmed it. Henderson was initially relieved to see that Hitler had accepted all of England's conditions. This relief turned to dismay when he read the end of the letter. Henderson made no secret of his horror at the extremely short deadline.

"They're giving the Polish negotiator 24 hours to come to Berlin. That's far too short a deadline. Why such haste? It sounds like an ultimatum."

"But not at all," Hitler replied. "This statement only underscores the urgency of the moment. Consider that a serious incident could occur at any time when two mobilized armies face each other."

Henderson insists on his view: *"The deadline is insufficient."*

"No," said Hitler. "It's been a week now of us repeating the same thing over and over again. We're constantly exchanging notes and answers. This senseless game can't go on forever. ... Think of the rifles that could go off of their own accord at any moment. Remember that my people are bleeding day after day."

The conversation between the two men is heated and becomes increasingly unfriendly and heated at the end. When Henderson sees that he cannot persuade Hitler to postpone the meeting, he asks at the end of the exchange of notes whether a Polish negotiator coming to Berlin would be received warmly and whether the negotiations would be conducted on the basis of complete equality.

Hitler promises both. He also indicates that he will prepare a new offer for Poland.

After his meeting with Hitler, Henderson immediately summoned his Polish counterpart, Lipski, to the British Embassy. He informed him of his conversation with Hitler and the contents of the letter to Chamberlain. The Briton used all his powers of persuasion with his Polish colleague, urgently pressing for the immediate dispatch of a plenipotentiary negotiator from Warsaw to Berlin. Henderson then called his French and Italian counterparts in Berlin, quickly briefed them, and asked them both to immediately contact the governments in Paris and Rome and advise them to intervene in Warsaw without delay.

³³⁰ The following conversation is reproduced from Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, pages 473 f.

Henderson urges the Polish Foreign Ministry to send a negotiator authorized to conduct negotiations to Berlin as soon as possible.

Then, at 9 p.m., Henderson contacted Minister Halifax in London by telegram. He announced Hitler's letter, which he intended to have translated into English before sending it. As a preliminary note—because time was of the essence—he pointed out that Hitler was expecting a plenipotentiary Polish negotiator in Berlin the following day, August 30. He also announced that Hitler had accepted the conditions of the latest Halifax proposal and that the note from Berlin made it clear that the German proposals had never aimed to restrict Poland's vital interests.³³¹ An hour later, Henderson sent the translated Hitler reply. In the accompanying text to the Hitler letter, he put it succinctly: *"Hitler is not bluffing. He is ready to strike. The only chance we have left to prevent war is for Beck to come to Berlin."* Henderson was clearly genuinely striving for peace.

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Meanwhile, in Warsaw, Foreign Minister Beck, Defense Minister Kasprzycki, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Marshal Rydz-ŷmigŷy, were in consultation. Their conclusion: there would be no concessions on the Danzig question, and Poland would have to resist the German demand militarily. A decision to negotiate, as urgently advised by the British, was not reached. In the afternoon, the Council of Ministers convened and decided to officially announce general mobilization for the following day, August 30.³³³ Both countries, Poland and Germany, had thus far refrained from doing so because of the demonstrative effect of such a step.

The French and English ambassadors, determined to prevent Poland from provoking war at the last minute, immediately protested the decision to publicly mobilize at the Polish Foreign Ministry. Paris and London now expected negotiations, not escalation, from Warsaw. If Warsaw, and not Berlin, were to trigger the war, there would be no invocation of Article 5, and Paris and London would lack the legal basis under international law to settle accounts with Germany. The two ambassadors' protest could not prevent what was meant to be prevented. Around 6 p.m., the Polish Foreign Minister assured the British Ambassador, Kennard, that the general mobilization could be kept secret.³³⁴ But just an hour later, he admitted that this was no longer possible. Foreign Minister Beck followed this admission with the fateful question:

³³¹ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 490

³³² Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 493

³³³ Benoist-M  chin, Volume 7, page

³³⁴ 478 Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 475

*"Would Her Majesty's Government be responsible for instructing the Polish government to refrain from a measure that is crucial to Poland's security and thereby endangers Poland's existence?"*³³⁵

Following the Hitler-Henderson meeting, Marshal Göring in the Reich Chancellery and Sir Ogilvie-Forbes – second in command at the British Embassy in London – were informed almost simultaneously of the content and course of the encounter. Both were dismayed and contacted Dahlems only minutes after one another. Both were deeply concerned that the dispute over the insufficiently short deadline and the resulting tension could jeopardize the British government's willingness to engage in further mediation. Ogilvie-Forbes was Dahlems' contact person at the British Embassy in Berlin.

Göring is very upset, blames Henderson for the upset – which is probably unjustified – he complains about the “audacity” of the Poles towards Germany and mentions that just today five German refugees on their way from east to west, while attempting to swim across the Warta River, were shot by the Polish military. This greatly angered Hitler.³³⁶

Marshal Göring asks the Swede to fly to London immediately and give the British government a detailed report on the evening's events, to emphasize Germany's continued determination to reach an understanding, and to inform them that

"Hitler intends to send Poland a note tomorrow containing such favorable terms that they will surely be accepted by Poland and endorsed by the British government." Göring and Dahlems parted at 2 a.m. Before going to bed, the Swede informed Ogilvie-Forbes so that he could report back³³⁷

to London as quickly as possible.

Wednesday, August 30th

Two days before the outbreak of war.

At 4 a.m., Henderson received instructions from London to inform the German Reich government that they were carefully examining the German note and that they did not expect to receive an authorized negotiator from Warsaw to Berlin within 24 hours. Henderson did not pass on the warning that no Pole would be arriving on this "last" day to either Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop or Hitler.

³³⁵ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 482

³³⁶ Dahlems, page

³³⁷ 95 Dahlems, page 99

All morning, a group of diplomats and lawyers worked on the new negotiating offer to the Polish government, following Hitler's instructions and Göring's suggestions.

Dahlems departs from Berlin at 5 a.m. He will be received at 10 Downing Street at 10:30 a.m.

According to Dahlems, Prime Minister Chamberlain...

He had apparently reached the limits of his patience and lost faith in the benefit.

further negotiations were lost.³³⁹ Dahlems now begins to argue "around the corner." He reports on the violence perpetrated by the Poles against German refugees and other atrocities, adding that if the Germans provoked the violence by the Poles, it is important to convince the Poles not to be led into committing such atrocities and to refrain from them. Dahlems's argument is accepted. Thus, at 5:30 p.m., a telegram is sent from London to Kennard in Warsaw with instructions to recommend the following to the Polish government: *"The atmosphere could improve if the Polish government issues the following directive to all military and civilian authorities:*

- 1. Not to shoot at German refugees or minority members who are causing unrest, but to imprison them.*
- 2. To refrain from acts of violence against members of minorities and to prevent them.*
- 3. German minority members who want to leave Poland are moving allow.*
- 4. To cease inflammatory radio propaganda.*

Please inform Foreign Secretary Beck that the British government is keen to deprive Hitler of any pretext for resorting to excessive measures." The telegram is a remarkable document in light of the ³⁴⁰

Polish attacks against members of the German minority in Poland, which Kennard so often denied.

Once this point has been dealt with, Dahlems, before Chamberlain and Halifax, once again interprets the details of Hitler's reply note, including all the explanations Göring had provided. He does not forget to mention that the German Chancellor has announced his intention to present a "generous offer" for Poland. Here, Chamberlain makes a remark that is difficult to comprehend, even though his distrust of Hitler since the Czechoslovakian situation is certainly well-founded. The British Prime Minister tells Dahlems that he suspects Hitler's six-point reply and the new proposal for Poland are "a feint to buy time."³⁴¹ So far, it

³³⁸ Official residence of the British Prime

³³⁹ Minister Dahlems,

³⁴⁰ page 101 British War Bluebook,

³⁴¹ Document 85 Dahlems, page 102

Chamberlain and Halifax had accused Hitler of putting the Poles under time pressure. Now he himself is supposedly trying to buy time. This doesn't add up. One can only assume that Chamberlain inadvertently let slip his real fear on August 30th: that Hitler might wait until Poland starts a war. Then England would be excluded under international law and would have no legitimacy to enter a war with Germany. That such a thought wouldn't have been far-fetched for Chamberlain is demonstrated by the Poles' latest move: they mobilized against England's advice.

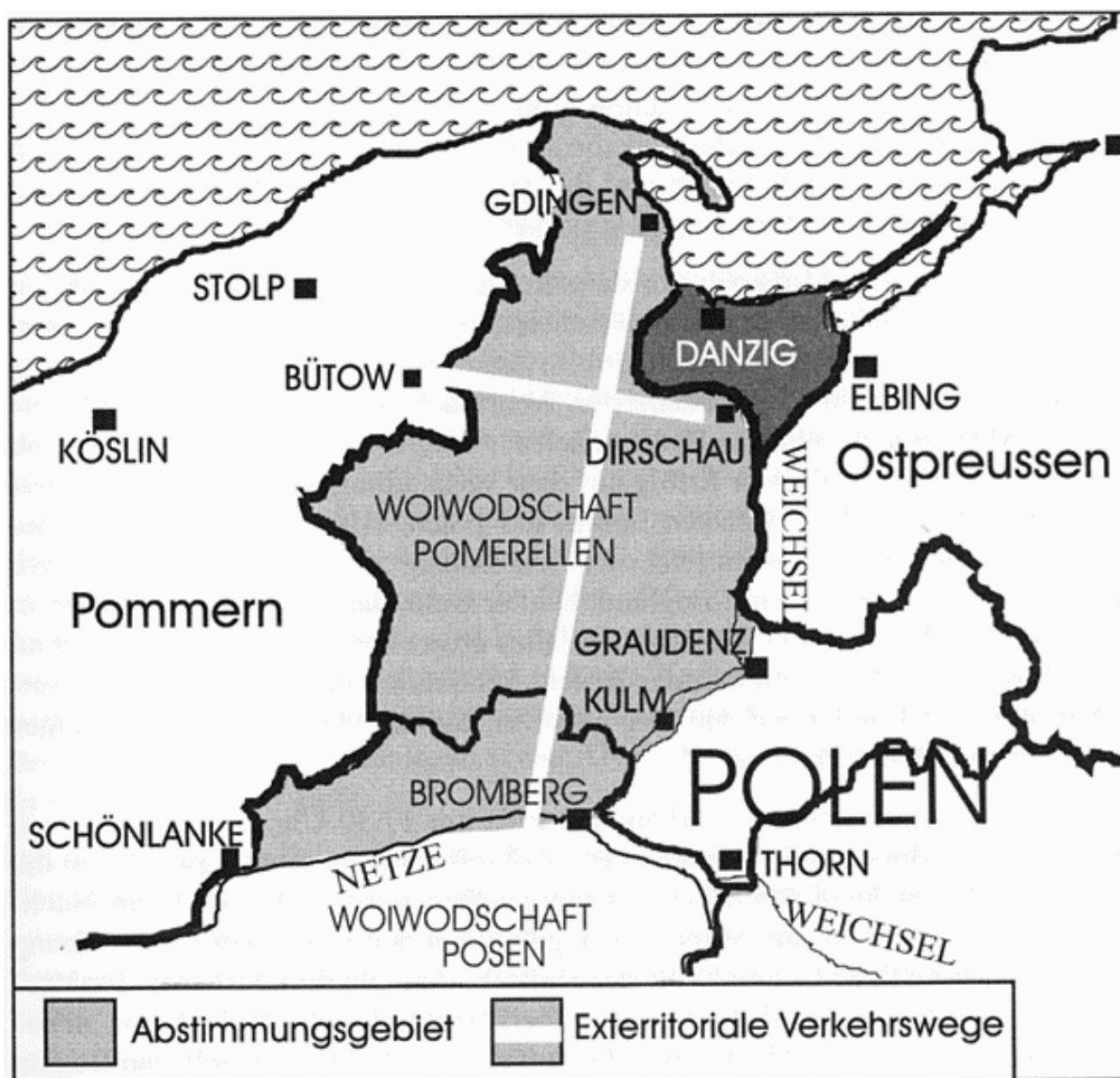
At 12:40 p.m., Göring informed Dahlerus by telephone from the Reich Chancellery; Dahlerus was still conferring with the British. Göring announced that Hitler would most likely propose a plebiscite for the population in the corridor, so that they could decide for themselves whether their territory should be Polish or German. Furthermore, Göring announces that an emigration right should be agreed upon for the minorities who, even after the drawing of new borders, remain outside their own people.³⁴² Göring and Dahlerus try in vain to persuade the British to act as “mediators” and to use these proposals to bring the Poles to the negotiating table. Chamberlain dismisses Dahlerus without further communication to Hitler, von Ribbentrop, or Göring, and the Swedish mediator flies back to Berlin.

The new proposal for the Polish government is ready there by midday. Hitler has significantly scaled back the earlier German demands from the time of his democratic predecessor governments. Eastern Upper Silesia and the province of Posen are definitively off the table. He has also reduced the demands he made to Henderson just four days earlier regarding West Prussia and the Corridor. Hitler evidently wants to convince the British with a very moderate proposal so that they can, in good conscience, put pressure on the Poles. Nevertheless, the new proposal demands more from Germany than Hitler's March proposal, which Poland rejected. The list of German demands and offers comprises 16 points.³⁴³ These include: • Danzig returns to the Reich. • In the northern Corridor, the population is to decide for themselves in a plebiscite.

The question is whether the territory will become Polish or German. • The port city of Gdynia will remain Polish in any case. • Depending on the outcome of the vote in the corridor, either Germany will receive extraterritorial transport routes to East Prussia or Poland will receive extraterritorial transport routes to Gdynia.

³⁴² Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 519

³⁴³ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 458



Map 35: The German proposals of August 30, 1939 (as Map 33)

- The special rights desired for Poland in Gdansk are negotiated and Germany was granted equal rights in Gdynia.
- The complaints of the German minority in Poland and the Polish minority in Germany will be submitted to and investigated by an international commission. Both nations will pay compensation to affected victims in accordance with the commission's findings.
- In the event of an agreement based on these proposals, Poland will demobilize and Germany immediately its armed forces.

The proposed treaty is designed to both end the unfortunate separation of East Prussia from the German Reich, as decreed in Versailles, and to guarantee Poland's free access to the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, it safeguards the right to self-determination of the affected Polish, Kashubian, and German populations.

Population shares in a contemporary manner. But however modern and democratic the proposed regulation may be, it harbors enormous explosive potential for the multi-ethnic state of Poland with its unintegrated minorities. The Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Czech minorities could later follow the German example and also seek to leave Poland, which they dislike, through regional referendums.

August 30, the Wednesday before the outbreak of war, passes without a Polish negotiator appearing in Berlin to receive Hitler's new negotiating proposal. Tension and nervousness rise in the Foreign Office and among the soldiers of the now fully mobilized Wehrmacht. Even those closest to Hitler are uncertain whether the "Führer" wants war or success through negotiation. Thus, everything hinges on the Poles' next move. Hitler is skeptical of Poland. For him, not only Danzig is at stake, but above all his longed-for pact with England. And he knows that in this respect, he is in the hands of the Poles. Göring sees things somewhat more optimistically. He believes in fair mediation by the British. After all, he has sent Dahlem the message to London that the "Führer" is preparing a generous offer for Poland.³⁴⁴

Instead of a Polish negotiator, at 5:30 p.m. news arrived from the German embassy in Warsaw that general mobilization had been publicly announced throughout Poland that morning.³⁴⁵ When no one from Warsaw was announced by mid-afternoon, and Hitler's hopes dwindled, he summoned General von Brauchitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and General Keitel, Chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces, to the Reich Chancellery and postponed the start of the attack against Poland, previously set for August 31, by another 24 hours.³⁴⁶ The new attack date was now September 1, with a time of attack set for 4:45 a.m. Hitler thus granted himself another chance to achieve success without bloodshed. For him, a war, two days before he was to launch it, was clearly still only the lesser of two possible solutions.

In Warsaw, meanwhile, the Polish government remains convinced that Hitler is bluffing and is himself in a tight spot.³⁴⁷ Hitler's last threat to invade Poland on August 26 is retrospectively considered a failed intimidation tactic, which will now be followed by a second. Foreign Minister Beck believes that they simply need to ride it out with nerves of steel. Rumors of an impending uprising by the Wehrmacht generals and the certainty of

³⁴⁴ Dahlerus, page 102

³⁴⁵ AA 1939 No. 1, document 13

³⁴⁶ v. Below, page 191

³⁴⁷ Rassinier, page 292

English and French arms aid support Beck in his belief. He is determined not to send anyone to Berlin.

No impetus for Poland to reduce the risk of war broke out came from Paris and Washington that day either. What transpired between Washington, Paris, and Warsaw seemed rather eerie. They mutually urged each other to remain firm. France's Foreign Minister, Léger, insisted to Prime Minister Daladier that the Poles not be forced to negotiate with the Germans.³⁴⁸ He did this—unusually—in the presence of the American ambassador, Bullitt, which amounted to a signal to Roosevelt. A very similar situation unfolded in Warsaw at the same time. There, the American ambassador, Biddle, was informed of the Poles' opinion of Hitler's proposal and how they intended to proceed. At 7:30 p.m., Biddle reported from Warsaw to Secretary of State Hull in Washington that the Polish Foreign Minister, Beck, had rejected Hitler's offer of negotiations "40 times over."³⁴⁹ Still, the Americans had not warned the Poles that they were now also threatened from the east. Late that evening, Biddle is summoned to see Beck again, who explains to him why he refuses to compromise. Beck also states that he does not intend to send a negotiator to Berlin. Beck has secured Washington's blessing in revealing his intentions, as Biddle does not advise him against it.

Given Poland's stance, one's gaze inevitably falls back on England, the mediator in the crisis. At 10 a.m., shortly before Dahlem's arrival at Prime Minister Chamberlain's residence, a telegram arrived from the British ambassador, Kennard, in Warsaw.³⁵⁰ Kennard reported on his assessment of the current situation in Poland and shared his own opinion of Hitler's short-notice deadline and of Berlin as the venue for the German-Polish talks. Kennard was certain that Beck would not travel to Germany and that Poland would sooner fight and perish than have Beck send anyone to Berlin. Kennard wrote that the Polish government, which had rejected the German March proposals without England's backing, could not possibly accept further German demands now that it had England and France as allies. What Kennard did not mention was what advice he had given Foreign Minister Beck.

His report gives the impression that he himself recommended to Beck that no one should be sent to Berlin.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Bavendamm, *Roosevelt's Path to War*, page 603;

³⁴⁹ British War Bluebook, Document 84

³⁵⁰

³⁵¹ The English historian Nicoll claims in his book "England's War Against Germany" (page 187) that "Ambassador Kennard constantly advised Polish statesmen not to negotiate, but to let it come to a war with Germany." However, Nicoll provides no source for this claim.

At 7:00 p.m., Halifax sent the next telegram to Warsaw. He instructed Kennard to inform Beck that the German side had accepted the English proposals for direct German-Polish negotiations and the Five-Power Guarantee and assured him that Germany would respect Poland's vital interests. However, not a word was mentioned about Hitler's new Sixteen Points, some of which he already knew from Dahlem. Instead,

"that it looks as if the German government is working on new proposals, and when those arrive, we can see what happens next." Chamberlain is quite obviously trying ³⁵²

to use up Hitler's time.

Towards evening, it also became apparent to the German side that Foreign Minister Halifax had allowed the entire deadline Hitler had set for a negotiated peace settlement to expire without urging Poland to immediately begin talks with the Germans. At 6:50 p.m., he sent Henderson in Berlin instructions to "suggest to the German Reich government that it invite the Polish ambassador to receive the new German proposals and forward them to Warsaw." Halifax undermined Hitler's demand for an immediate commencement of negotiations by writing: *"We cannot advise the Polish government to allow a Polish negotiator with full powers to receive the German proposals to come to Berlin."*³⁵³

The sabotage is perfect because Halifax sends the letter so late that Hitler's deadline for the start of German-Polish talks has already passed by the time it arrives.

At 11 p.m., Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop in Berlin no longer expected the arrival of a Polish envoy. The deadline set by Hitler as an "expectation" had thus passed without result. Shortly before midnight, Ambassador Henderson then contacted the authorities—completely unexpectedly at that hour—to deliver his government's aforementioned reply to Hitler's letter from the previous day and to explain that they had been unable to advise the Poles to engage in talks there and now.

Thus, August 30th became a showdown between Chamberlain and Hitler, rather than a struggle for peace. Hitler in Berlin had hoped all day that, faced with the threat of war, Chamberlain would urge the Poles to move towards Germany. After the British Prime Minister's letter of August 28th, he had indeed been able to assume that the British would now mediate between the Germans and the Poles. Hitler believed that the threat of a mobilized Wehrmacht would spur the Poles into action. He was quite certain that his very moderate offer to Poland would also win Chamberlain over to the German side at the last minute.

³⁵² Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 539

³⁵³ British War Bluebook, Document 88

Chamberlain in London, however, has not given the Poles the slightest hint to reconsider their position regarding Danzig and the corridor. Instead, he tries – with notes back and forth – to buy time in Poland's interest. He is not concerned with Danzig or minority issues. His concern is that for three years Hitler has been using threats to impose his will on foreign powers. Chamberlain wants to "tame" Hitler. In doing so, he destroys one of the last chances for peace by dragging out the mediation process until Hitler's "decision date" arrives. Chamberlain waits until Hitler loses face or patience. He lets August 30th pass with declarations of peace and diplomatic maneuvering instead of acting decisively as a broker. On this day, on the threshold of war, both Hitler and Chamberlain are prisoners of their experiences of recent years. Hitler knows that since 1920, the victorious powers have made virtually no concessions to the German Reich to improve the postwar situation. Everything achieved so far has been obtained through unilateral action or the threat of force. Chamberlain knows that this is how it was, and that he cannot tolerate any further concessions under threat.

Perhaps some English people are thinking on this day what Churchill said in a speech to the House of Commons shortly before Hitler's accession to power on November 24, 1932: *"If the British government*

truly wishes to do something to promote peace, then it should take the lead and reopen the question of Danzig and the Corridor while the victorious powers still have the upper hand. If these questions are not resolved, there can be no hope of a lasting peace."

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The last day before the outbreak of war, Thursday, August 31st.

The aforementioned midnight meeting between Ambassador Henderson and Minister von Ribbentrop turns into a disaster, contrary to both men's intentions. After so many nights of negotiations last week, both men are on edge. Henderson hands over Chamberlain's reply note of August 30th.

August, 6:50 p.m. 355 He adds two oral statements to the letter. The first concerns the mutual restraint that is now expected. He says that complete restraint can only be expected from the Polish government if the provocations by the German minority in Poland cease. There are reports circulating that the Germans in Poland are carrying out acts of sabotage, which justify the harshest countermeasures on the part of the Polish government. Von Ribbentrop loses his composure and replies that the

³⁵⁴ Kern, page 82.

³⁵⁵ The following conversation is taken from the transcript of the chief interpreter, Dr. Schmidt. See ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 461

The most outrageous acts of sabotage originated from the Poles. The Foreign Office alone had received reports of over 200 murders of ethnic Germans in Poland. The conversation turned frosty.

Secondly, Henderson refers to the German demand for the appearance of a plenipotentiary representative of the Polish government in Berlin. Henderson explains that the British government is unable to recommend to the Polish government that it agree to this negotiation procedure. It proposes that the Reich government follow the normal diplomatic channels and hand over the German proposals to the Polish ambassador. Henderson then asks von Ribbentrop whether he can provide him with the proposals in writing. Von Ribbentrop notes that the British government has thus far obviously not used its influence with the Polish government to persuade it to enter into immediate negotiations.³⁵⁶ Indeed, no sign of a willingness to negotiate has been seen from Poland either. Thus, Ribbentrop can even assume that England is giving Poland a free hand in the Danzig question. He suspects that, contrary to all its assurances to the contrary, the British government no longer has any real interest in persuading the Poles to compromise and that it is playing for time until Hitler gives up or starts a war. Henderson's recommendation to pursue the normal diplomatic route sounds like anything but an English effort to find a quick solution. Von Ribbentrop must fear that the "normal route" will take a lot of time and end once again with a Polish rejection. The German minister reacts angrily. Instead of attempting to persuade Henderson with Hitler's 16-point proposal, he reads it aloud so quickly that Henderson cannot understand or retain everything. Finally, von Ribbentrop declares that the offer is now obsolete—since no Pole has appeared in Berlin—and refuses to hand it over in writing. British mediation—insofar as it was mediation—has thus failed, at least for the time being.

Henderson leaves the Foreign Office and, determined to leave no stone unturned, hurries to the Polish Embassy. He informs Lipski of what he has gleaned from Hitler's Sixteen Points from his conversation with Ribbentrop: that Germany merely envisions the cession of Danzig and a plebiscite in the Polish Corridor, and that the proposals are not unreasonable on the whole.³⁵⁷ In view of the extremely critical situation, Henderson insists emphatically that Lipski should immediately call Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and request that the new German proposals be handed over to him. Lipski stonewalls and declares that he cannot do so without consulting Warsaw. Henderson persists in his advice and becomes personal:

³⁵⁶ IMT Negotiations, Volume X, page 311

³⁵⁷ Henderson, page 273

"They haven't said a word for four months. That will be held against them if war breaks out." Lipski now promises at least to speak with his ³⁵⁸

government by phone.

At the time of the failed Ribbentrop-Henderson meeting – also shortly after midnight – Dahlems returned from London and went directly to Göring to report to him. Dahlems assessed his London mission quite optimistically. He didn't forget to mention England's desire for direct German-Polish talks. Göring's news to Dahlems was Hitler's Sixteen Points. His comment after reading them out:

*"Hitler, in his desire to reach an agreement with England, has prepared an offer to Poland which represents a great concession on the part of Germany, which, in its obviously democratic, just and practically feasible nature, must cause a great sensation and which can be accepted by both Poland and England."*³⁵⁹

Both men, Göring and Dahlems, agree during their conversation that they are close to success in their struggle for peace. Dahlems now wants to know the outcome of Ribbentrop's meeting with Henderson and calls the embassy from Göring's phone. Ogilvie-Forbes³⁶⁰ informs him of the disastrous outcome of the meeting.

It is now 2 a.m. The Marshal and the Swede are still trying to salvage what they can. Göring authorizes Dahlems to immediately dictate Hitler's 16-point proposal to Ogilvie-Forbes by telephone. This is intended to ensure that Hitler's offer to Poland still reaches Henderson. Immediately afterward, Göring informs Hitler of Ribbentrop's botched delivery of the notes. Hitler expresses his appreciation to the Marshal for his swift intervention.³⁶¹ Ogilvie-Forbes cannot immediately forward Hitler's proposal to Ambassador Henderson because he is still at the Polish embassy. He places the 16 points, transcribed during the telephone dictation, on Henderson's desk and goes to bed. At 9 a.m., the ambassador finds the document and now knows the full text of Hitler's offer. At the same time, Göring sends Dahlems to Henderson with a copy of the text to ensure that the ambassador has the correct version. He takes advantage of the Swedish mediator's arrival to ask him to deliver the Hitler proposal to Lipski at the Polish embassy as quickly as possible, accompanied by Ogilvie-Forbes. The two emissaries arrive at Lipski's at 11 a.m. The scene that follows has something eerily unreal about it.³⁶² The embassy is practically empty.

³⁵⁸ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document 575

³⁵⁹ Dahlerus, page 105

³⁶⁰ Chargé d'Affaires at the British Embassy during the absence of Ambassador Rassinier, page

³⁶¹ 294 The following

³⁶² sequence of events is described by Dahlerus. See Dahlerus, page 110, and IMT document-
te, Volume IX, page 521

The moving boxes are lined up in the hall. The embassy staff is busy preparing for departure. In Lipski's almost empty room, Dahlems reads him Hitler's proposal, which is addressed to the Polish government. After listening briefly, Lipski interrupts and explains that he doesn't understand the content, even though he speaks fluent German. The Swede leaves the room to make a copy of Hitler's note and hand it over.

Meanwhile, Lipski reveals to the remaining Ogilvie-Forbes that he

"I have absolutely no reason to be interested in notes or offers from the German side. I know the situation in Germany. ...I am convinced that in the event of war, unrest will break out here and that Polish troops will march on Berlin." Dahlems returns and hands Hitler's proposal to Lipski. It is now almost noon. Both emissaries hurriedly³⁶³

return to the British embassy and report back to Henderson. Dahlems immediately informs the Foreign Office in London from the embassy about his remarkable encounter with Ambassador Lipski. He complains that Poland is obviously deliberately destroying any possibility of negotiation. Lipski had told him that the German proposals were not even worth considering.

Dahlems is agitated because he realizes that his mediation efforts will likely fail due to the Poles' intransigence. At the end of his report, the Swede emphasizes that he himself considers the German 16-point proposal to be extraordinarily generous.

In London, Dahlerus's call was evidently considered extremely unhelpful. Halifax immediately issued a reprimand to Henderson, requesting that "in the future he please prevent persons who were not part of the English Embassy from using his telephone line."³⁶⁴ This in itself ludicrous admonition regarding telephone use fuels the suspicion that Foreign Secretary Halifax no longer desired any further mediation efforts at this point.

During the past few hours, the Foreign Office received another report from Ambassador Kennard in Warsaw.³⁶⁵ Kennard reports that he spoke with Polish Foreign Minister Beck the previous day, and that Beck promised him a written reply to the British mediation proposal by noon today. Beck expressed great relief that the British government had not in any way supported the German demands. Kennard here voices what von Ribbentrop feared and what Göring, trusting in England's "fair" mediation, did not suspect. The British government is not lifting a finger to gain understanding in Poland for the German position.

³⁶³ Dahlerus, page 110, and IMT documents, Volume IX, page

³⁶⁴ 521; Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VII, Document

³⁶⁵ 589; British War Bluebook, Document 93

to stimulate action. England is making no effort whatsoever to resolve the Danzig dispute, which it itself created at Versailles.

Shortly before Dahlems informs the Foreign Office in London of his strange encounter with Lipski—around noon—a telegram is sent from there to Warsaw.³⁶⁶ Foreign Minister Halifax instructs Ambassador Kennard, together with his French counterpart, to request the Polish government to confirm to the German Reich government that it “accepts the principle of direct German-Polish talks.” This is still a far cry from the advice to send an envoy to Berlin authorized to conduct talks.

Apparently only minutes after Dahlerus's phone call about Lipski's behavior, two further instructions came from London. Henderson in Berlin received a telephone call at about 1 p.m. instructing him to inform the German government that the Polish government would now be sending its ambassador to the Foreign Ministry.³⁶⁷ And Kennard in Warsaw was telegraphed at 1:45 p.m.³⁶⁸ instructing him to immediately advise the Polish government to send its ambassador in Berlin to the German government. Lipski should declare himself there ready to receive new German proposals and forward them to Warsaw. Warsaw could then also submit proposals.

This telegram also contains no mention of the Polish envoy, requested by Hitler and authorized to begin talks.

It seems as if Chamberlain and Halifax are trying to stall Hitler on this point until he weakens or starts the war himself.

Henderson immediately went to the Foreign Office with his instructions and informed State Secretary von Weizsäcker of the news from London. The message was immediately forwarded to Hitler, who was about to sign "Directive No. 1 for the Conduct of the War," that is, the order to attack Poland. According to this announcement from London, Hitler postponed signing the directive once again.³⁶⁹

The second instruction on the same matter, from Halifax to Kennard, intersected with two dispatches from Warsaw to London and Berlin. In the first, from Polish Foreign Minister Beck to British Foreign Secretary Halifax, the Polish government declared its readiness for talks with the German Reich government.³⁷⁰ This message passed through Kennard and thus took from about noon until 6:30 p.m. to reach London.

³⁶⁶ British War Bluebook, Document 94

³⁶⁷ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page

³⁶⁸ 509; British War Bluebook, Document

³⁶⁹ 95 Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 510. However, the historian B.-M. provides no source reference for this. this matter.

³⁷⁰ British War Bluebook, Document 97

The second dispatch was sent directly by radio from Beck to Lipski in Berlin at 12:40 PM, where it was intercepted and decoded by German signals intelligence. Two officially documented transcripts of the dispatch exist today. In the Polish transcript, Lipski is instructed to meet with Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and inform him:

"This night the Polish government was informed by the British government of their discussions with the German government about the possibility of direct negotiations between the German and Polish governments."

The Polish government will consider the British government's proposal favorably and will give the British government a formal answer on this question within a few hours." The transcript of the German radio reconnaissance intercept³⁷¹

includes an appendix to this instruction, which reads:

"Under no circumstances should you engage in factual discussions."

If the Reich government makes oral or written proposals, you must declare that you have no authority whatsoever to receive or discuss such proposals, and that you are to transmit only the above communication to your government and will receive further instructions only after 372

to obtain." The

authenticity of this German documentation is supported by the fact that Lipski strictly adheres to this additional instruction, and that Kennard confirms it in a report of the same day.³⁷³

With the submission of this overheard directive to Hitler, Göring, and von Ribbentrop, the almost last chance for peace is shattered. It is now 1 p.m., 16 hours until the scheduled start of the Wehrmacht's attack against Poland.

Göring and Dahlems were discussing how to proceed when a messenger delivered the decoded Lipski directive.³⁷⁴ The Marshal was furious.

He gives Dahlems a copy of the deciphered text. After about two more hours of deliberation, the Swede suggests to the Marshal that he should now initiate negotiations with the British himself. Both men agree that Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, with his lack of self-control and his willingness to risk war with Poland, is not the right man for the job. Both know that a swift agreement with the Poles is no longer possible, one that could halt the Wehrmacht.

Göring travels to Hitler to obtain permission for renewed talks with the British government. The "Führer" is more than skeptical, but he accepts the Marshal's idea. He approves immediate talks between Göring and Henderson.

³⁷¹ Polish White Book, Document 110;

³⁷² Dahlems, page

³⁷³ 112; British War Blue Book, Document

³⁷⁴ 96. The following events are taken from the Dahlems report. See Dahlems, pages 111–112.

The proposal to have England negotiate on behalf of Poland. Hitler knows that the now certain absence of a Polish negotiator would otherwise force him to abandon Danzig and the German minority in Poland or attack Poland within 14 hours. The detour via London is thus also his last chance for an understanding with England. Hitler is evidently still—on the afternoon before the outbreak of war—prepared to call off the Polish campaign. Otherwise, he would have detained Göring at this very moment. The only condition Hitler attaches to the Göring-Henderson talks is that a representative of a neutral state participate. That will then be the Swede Dahlems.

Meanwhile, Dahlems hurried to the British embassy to lay the groundwork. Henderson received him kindly but immediately expressed his suspicion that the Germans only wished to drive a wedge between England and Poland.

Dahlems shows Henderson the decoded text of Beck's directive to Lipski, making it clear to him that in this highly volatile situation, the only way to preserve peace was if Göring—with Hitler's approval—and Henderson could reach an agreement on a program for Anglo-German negotiations. Dahlems writes about the meeting:

"I am convinced that Henderson, although he listened attentively to me, was inwardly of the firm opinion all along that the whole thing was a game of intrigue, an attempt to divide Poland and England in order to give Germany an opportunity to attack Poland undisturbed."

At 4:30 p.m., the conference with Henderson, Göring, Dahlems, and Ogilvie-

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Forbes took place. Göring received Henderson particularly warmly. Both were obviously trying to create a favorable atmosphere for the upcoming discussion. When the topic came up, the German Marshal suggested to the British ambassador that negotiations be initiated between Germany and Great Britain, in which the latter should also negotiate on behalf of Poland. Henderson remained reserved. He did not believe that Göring's proposal would lead to a solution and therefore did not want to follow it.³⁷⁶ Göring pressed on and presented the Englishman with the decrypted cipher telegram from Beck to Lipski as proof that Germany could hardly reach an agreement with Poland under the given circumstances. Göring could not have known that the British government and Kennard on the ground in Warsaw were still reinforcing Poland's blockade. Henderson then agreed to forward the new German proposal to his government. Henderson also attempted to raise a concern during the meeting. He asked Marshal Göring to prevent the broadcast of Hitler's Sixteen Points, scheduled for that same evening. Henderson argued that this would extinguish the last faint hope of reaching a German-Polish peace agreement.

³⁷⁵ Dahlems, page 119

³⁷⁶ Henderson, page 275

The talks would be destroyed.³⁷⁷ The conversation between the four men ends shortly before 7 p.m., without Göring having achieved anything definitive.

Ambassador Henderson's desire to keep Hitler's 16 Points secret from the world for as long as possible is in line with Duff Cooper's request to the editors of the Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph to publish the 16-

The point is to comment on Hitler's proposal as negatively as possible. This desire is clearly aimed at the war readiness of the people in England, France, and the USA. Limiting the German demands to what is legitimate and the proposal to let the affected residents of the corridor vote on whether they belong to Poland or Germany might no longer be enough for many French, British, and Americans to justify going to war on behalf of Poland.

Meanwhile, around 4 p.m., Ambassador Lipski sought a meeting with Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop. The minister had known for a few hours that Lipski was neither permitted to negotiate nor to accept German proposals. At 6:30 p.m., the two men stood facing each other.³⁷⁸ Lipski read aloud the Polish declaration, which von Ribbentrop already knew from the decoded telegram from Warsaw. The minister then asked whether the ambassador was allowed to negotiate. The ambassador replied in the negative. The conversation touched upon the German-English exchange of views from the past few days and Hitler's expectation of reaching an agreement by the evening of the 3 August to see a Polish negotiating representative in Berlin. Then von Ribbentrop asks Ambassador Lipski a second time if he may negotiate. When Lipski refuses, the conversation ends. Neither von Ribbentrop nor Lipski makes the slightest attempt to give the other any way out. Both know that this means war.

Thus, by 7 p.m., the last two attempts to prevent the Wehrmacht's attack on September 1st had failed and come to nothing. The effort to begin talks with Poland about Hitler's 16-point proposal had failed, as had the attempt to negotiate with England instead of Poland.

Meanwhile, power struggles raged in the Paris cabinet. President Daladier maintained that France must remain uncompromising towards Germany.³⁷⁹ Hitler would not politically survive the outbreak of war in his own country.

Foreign Minister Bonnet advises negotiating with Germany, Italy, England, and Poland as quickly as possible about anything that could trigger war.³⁸⁰ And the French ambassador Coulondre in Berlin writes different things from day to day, sometimes

³⁷⁷ Henderson, page 275.

³⁷⁸ The following conversation was transcribed by the chief interpreter, Dr. Schmidt. See ADAP, Series D. Volume VII, Document 476

³⁷⁹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 518

³⁸⁰ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 514

Sharpeningly inflammatory towards Daladier and sometimes moderatingly towards Bonnet. On August 30th, for

example, to the President: *"Dear Mr. President!*

The showdown is turning in our favor. I learn from a reliable source that Hitler has been acting cautiously for five days, the party leaders have become wavering, and reports speak of growing discontent among the population. ... We must remain firm, remain firm, and remain firm once more. ... If I am correctly informed, Hitler is claiming Danzig and a corridor through the corridor. We must convince him through our firm stance that he will get nothing more with the methods he has used so far. ..."

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The following day, August 31, Coulondre advised Foreign Minister Bonnet quite differently:

... According to reliable information, the German government is very annoyed that it has received no reply from Poland. It is to be feared that it will order an immediate attack if it has not received a response by the end of the morning. ...It would be entirely in the interest of the Polish government to inform Berlin immediately that it approves of the contact and is sending Lipski as its plenipotentiary to negotiate with all the necessary instructions. ..." As intense as the internal power struggle was within the cabinet, France's foreign influence was weak when it came to resolving the problems initiated at ³⁸²

Versailles through consensus with Poland and the German Reich.

The mediation attempt by the French and the Italians on that day, the last before the war, which has already been mentioned, is hardly worth noting.

Around noon, Mussolini – probably at the earlier urging of the French –

A conference is proposed that is intended to fundamentally heal the damage caused by Versailles and all disputes between Italy, England, France, Poland, and Germany.³⁸³ French Foreign Minister Bonnet believes that this proposal should first be coordinated between Paris and London before Hitler is invited. Thus, a process of consultation ensues, lasting until late in the evening. The British government considers Mussolini's proposal a trap and advises against rejecting it outright, but rather to first demand the demobilization of the armies of all countries.³⁸⁴ At 10 p.m., the French government is ready to inform the British of its decision that it will accept Mussolini's proposal if the German-Polish negotiations fail. London replies that it will send its decision to Rome the following morning. But by then, the Wehrmacht is already rolling through Poland. Both the British and the French now let it go.

³⁸¹ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 494

³⁸² Bonnet, page 281

³⁸³ Bonnet, pages 285 f

³⁸⁴ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 513

At 7 p.m., the Italian ambassador, Dr. Attolico, will appear for an audience.

Hitler and presents him with the "Duce's" offer of mediation.³⁸⁵ Time is running out for Hitler. At this late hour, he can no longer stop the advance of the German troops. With each passing day that he is kept waiting, the danger increases that the campaign against Poland will bog down not in Warsaw, but in mud and rain. The generals have advised him not to begin a campaign after September 2nd. The British and French generals are also aware of this.³⁸⁶ General Gamelin has—as already mentioned—anticipated that a German attack would be unsuccessful in the autumn and winter. Thus, on this evening, Hitler is no longer faced with the choice between negotiation or war, but only between relinquishing Danzig and protecting the German minority in Poland, or war. He now sees that the British will not help him with the Poles, and that the Poles will not negotiate under British protection. Hitler gratefully declines the "Duce's" late offer.

A final opportunity to persuade the Poles, British, and French to reconsider their positions was quite obviously and deliberately missed that day. Roosevelt, who had known for seven days that Hitler had granted the Soviet Union eastern Poland as its sphere of influence, remained silent. It would not have been difficult for the President of the United States to imagine that, with this knowledge, the Polish government would have preferred the reintegration of the Free City of Danzig into the German Reich to the now certain loss of eastern Poland. It sounds rather macabre, but on the morning of this last day before the war, the American ambassador in Paris, Bullitt, assured his Polish counterpart, Count Łukasiewicz, that he knew from a reliable source that a possibly existing secret supplementary agreement to the Hitler-Stalin Pact concerned only the three Baltic states, but not Poland.³⁸⁷

Hitler had to admit a major defeat on the evening before the war.

His dream of a contract and partnership with England lies in ruins.

For him, it is the Poles whose intransigence blocks the path to fulfilling his dream. In his anger at this personal defeat, Hitler goes so far as to make a statement that seems to demonstrate his lust for war. After the Italian ambassador has left, Hitler turns to State Secretary Meißner, who remains in the room, and says:

³⁸⁵ ADAP, Series D, Volume VII, Document 478. The

³⁸⁶ French Foreign Minister Bonnet and the British Ambassador Henderson also write in their memoirs that they knew at the time that Hitler could no longer postpone the Polish campaign due to weather conditions.

³⁸⁷ Bavendamm, *Roosevelt's Road to War*, page 604, referring to the Polish historian Jędrzejewicz in his book Łukasiewicz, page 269

“Basically, I am extremely relieved that the Poles did not accept my offer. I made it against my own convictions, but if the Poles had accepted it, I would have been bound by it.”

Perhaps Hitler reveals with this remark that he had, in fact, wanted war with Poland for quite some time.³⁸⁸

Perhaps the statement is also the self-serving claim of a man who has failed at something and then asserts that he would have wanted it no other way. Or perhaps it is the eruption of pent-up anger against Poland's stance, which had spoiled his hopes of Danzig's return without bloodshed and a partnership with Great Britain: in other words, war as revenge for a foreign policy defeat for Hitler.

At 9 p.m., German radio announces Hitler's 16-point proposal. Between 9 and 10 p.m., State Secretary von Weizsäcker will present the written copies of Hitler's proposal one after the other to the ambassadors of England, France, Japan, and to the chargés d'affaires of the USA and the Soviet Union.

Late in the evening, the British government had to deal with the press once again. The Daily Telegraph reported in its evening edition on the London government's mediation efforts between Warsaw and Berlin.

The newspaper also mentioned that, upon receiving the negotiating offer from Germany, the Polish government had ordered general mobilization of its armed forces instead of accepting the offer. The evening edition of the Daily Telegraph was confiscated. A reprint, published as a late edition, made no mention of the general mobilization in Poland. Nothing in this grave crisis was to give England's readers cause for doubt.³⁸⁹

The outbreak of war

On September 1, 1939, at 4:45 a.m., the Wehrmacht launched an attack against Poland without a declaration of war.

General Keitel, as Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, advised Hitler to declare war on Poland, but the "Führer" refused.³⁹⁰ Hitler's reasons may have been operational or political. The operational reason lay in surprising the attacked Poles. But that counts for little here, because the Polish armed forces were already mobilized and fully deployed when the

³⁸⁸ Benoist-Méchin, Volume 7, page 524, who there mentions Otto Meißner, State Secretary under Ebert-Hindenburg-Hitler, Hamburg 1950, page 518 quoted.

³⁸⁹ Hedin, page 60

³⁹⁰ Keitel, page 251

War begins. The political aspect may stem from the experience of the First World War. In 1914, after Russia, France, and England had already mobilized their armies and navies, Germany was the first country to declare war. This was then interpreted in Versailles—among other things—as proof of German war guilt in accordance with the principle of causation. The defeated German Reich had to pay a high price in 1919 for this traditional and legally correct course of action. In the 20th century, declarations of war were by no means the general rule. Japan, for example, launched the Russo-Japanese War against Russia in 1904 without a declaration of war. Poland did the same against the Soviet Union in 1920. The USA entered the Vietnam War without a declaration of war. The NATO states launched their air strikes against Yugoslavia in 1999, also without a declaration of war.

Hitler also began the war without a declaration of war after six months of fruitless attempts at talks with the Polish government.

On September 3, England and France honored their alliance obligations and declared war on Germany. Almost the entire Commonwealth and several French colonies joined them on the same day. On September 3, these included Australia, Burma, Ceylon, India, Jordan, Cambodia, Laos, Morocco, New Zealand, Tunisia, and Vietnam. On the 6th, the Union of South Africa and Iraq followed, and on September 10, Canada. Chamberlain had thus fulfilled his promise from a week earlier. Within two days, the war over the city of Danzig and the Corridor had escalated into a world war.

From the very first day, the war in Poland spread to the civilian population in three ways. First, the Polish population in the combat zone was unexpectedly and unintentionally affected by the fighting. For example, on the first day of the war, during a German air raid against a Polish division, bombs were dropped on the city of Wieluń due to poor visibility. Approximately 1,200 innocent Polish civilians were killed.³⁹¹ Second, from the beginning of the war, the Polish population—and to some extent the military—hunted down Germans still living in Poland. In a wave of house searches, looting, arrests, expulsions, mistreatment, rape, and murder, over 5,000 of these Polish citizens with German as their mother tongue also lost their lives.³⁹² The largest massacre, with approximately 1,000 murders, took place

³⁹¹ The death toll from Wielun is taken from a Polish reader's letter dated August 8, 2001 in the FAZ.

³⁹² Rasmus, page 144. The figure of over 5,000 dead comes from a grave registry office in Poznań. The official figure from the Reich Ministry of the Interior in 1940 gives over 12,000 dead. Details about the Germans murdered and killed during the deportation marches and the German conscripts killed in the Polish army are documented in Hugo Rasmus's book "Pomerelia-West Prussia".

This took place on the third day of the war in the city of Bromberg. Thirdly, Polish snipers – especially in the cities – immediately began their partisan warfare against German troops after the withdrawal of the Polish forces. This led to reactions. Thus, from the very beginning of the war, fierce clashes erupted between the German military and the Polish population.

The death of such a large number of victims among the German and Polish civilian populations further breeds hatred in both nations.

On September 4, the flames spread to the West. England's Royal Air Force attacked German ships anchored off Cuxhaven, Wilhelmshaven, and Brunsbüttel with 16 bombers.³⁹³ On the 5th, the German U-boat arm and the Royal Navy began their war in the Atlantic. Both sank the first merchant ships of their opponents that day. On the 6th, the Germans issued an order not to fire on or inspect French merchant ships.³⁹⁴ The German government was still trying to keep France out of the war. On the 10th, England violated Belgium's neutrality by flying bombers over the small country, an attempt to draw this hitherto neutral state into the new war.³⁹⁵ From September 12th onward, British army troops landed on the continent and reinforced the French. In doing so, England fulfilled its guarantees to Poland, without relieving Poland in the slightest. France initially demonstrates loyalty to its alliance and deploys 80 divisions in the west between Switzerland and the North Sea.

They are initially facing only eleven Germans.

On September 6, the Polish daily newspaper EXPRESS PORANNY reported that the French army had invaded the Rhineland and that the Polish air force was bombing Berlin.³⁹⁶ Three days later, on the 9th, the Wehrmacht had already taken all of western Poland up to the line Narew River-Warsaw-Bug River.

On September 13, EXPRESS PORANNY ran the headline "German offensive in Poland collapses."³⁹⁷ Three days later, the DAILY EXPRESS from London reported that Saarlouis was surrounded by French troops, which meant nothing, as the city was located directly on the border.

However, the report is incorrect. On September 17, the Polish government, including President Moscicki and Commander-in-Chief Rydz-ŹmigŹy, fled to Romania, and the Soviet Red Army launched an attack against Poland from the east – also without a declaration of war. It reclaimed its former territory, which had been awarded to it after World War I by the victors' Supreme Allied Council. The Soviet government explained its actions to foreign governments with the following justification:

³⁹³ KTB-SKL, page 39

³⁹⁴ KTB-SKL, page 43

³⁹⁵ Stegemann, page 17

³⁹⁶ Piekalkiewicz, page 139

³⁹⁷ Piekalkiewicz, page 103

"The Polish state has ceased to exist, and the Soviet Union therefore had to take the Ukrainians and Belarusians living on Polish territory under its protection."

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Map 36: Poland's situation on the evening of September 18, 1939

The following day, the 18th, the Wehrmacht had occupied all of Poland west of the Curzon Line, except for the capital, Warsaw. On September 19th, the French and British governments reacted to the Soviets' involvement in the war and demanded that the Russian government withdraw its troops from Poland.

³⁹⁸ Piekalkiewicz, page 180

to withdraw. If this did not happen, Paris and London threatened, a declaration of war would automatically follow.³⁹⁹ That was it. Four weeks later, the British and French secretly contacted the Russians to invite them to war against Germany after all.

On September 29th, the capital Warsaw fell. Poland had lost. During the four weeks of Poland's conquest by the German Wehrmacht and the Soviet Red Army, Paris and London neither took serious military action against Germany nor declared war on the Soviet Union.

³⁹⁹ Piekalkiewicz, page 192

PART 6

CONCLUSION

Concluding remarks

England's contribution to the outbreak of war

France's contribution to the outbreak of war

Poland's contribution to the outbreak of war

The Soviet Union's contribution to the outbreak of war

The US contribution to the outbreak of war

Germany's contribution to the outbreak of war

balance sheet

CONCLUSION

The reasons that led to the Second World War are layered like painted glass panes. Only the colorful image on the uppermost, most recently placed pane is clearly visible. The image on the next pane below is still recognizable, but considerably more muted. The images on the lower, older glass plates only shimmer faintly, yet their colors and contours are still part of what is seen from above. Thus, the surface image shows that in 1939

- Germany invades Poland, • Russia steals half of Poland, • Poland is only the victim, • France and England help the oppressed Poland, • and finally the United States of America undermines the helpers.

support and rescue.

But the image below already reveals the conflict over Danzig, the Polish Corridor, and the fate of the persecuted minorities in the newly formed state of Poland. It shows how the Americans, British, and French created this problem in Versailles and tacitly accepted the resulting threat of war. It depicts the Poles, who, as the heirs of this problem, use their national pride to prevent the conflict from being resolved amicably and peacefully with the German Reich. And it shows a Germany that seeks this amicability but fails to achieve it, ultimately starting the war. From the lower strata, the many and lengthy life stories of all those peoples who clashed in 1939 and afterward in the Second World War are reflected.

Just as Asher ben Nathan says, "What preceded the first shots is decisive," so too is it crucial which people and which politicians contributed to the causes of the Second World War before its outbreak and right up to the point where its reverberations still linger. Every people and every politician who contributed to this bears their share of the blame for the Second World War.

Great Britain and France played a key role on the opposing side to Germany in both the First and Second World Wars.

England's contribution to the outbreak of war

For over three centuries, England's security and wealth depended on securing its food, raw materials, and financial needs from distant colonies and trade between them, and on using the people and troops from the colonies for its own benefit when necessary.

To protect security and this wealth preventively, English governments have always opposed any foreign power as soon as they suspect that the foreign power is developing into a competitor and a danger to England at sea and in Europe.

After France was eliminated as a rival by Great Britain in 1891

, With Russia defeated by Japan in 1905, Imperial Germany, with its economic miracle, naval construction program, and first colonies, now moved into a position that England considered dangerous. Although Germany demanded nothing from England—neither land nor people—its own rise earned it the enmity of the British.

From the boycott of "Made in Germany" in 1887, to the mobilization of the British fleet over a single small German warship that anchored off Agadir in 1911 and "showed its colors," to the alliance with France against Germany, England's preventive stance was consistent. However, in 1914, this preventive attitude led England to seize the opportunity for war with Germany. The German plea to Great Britain and France to maintain peace in the west during a war in the east between Serbs, Russians, Habsburgs, and Germans was rejected by both England and France. Even the offer to spare Belgium could not persuade England to stay out of the war.

The First World War that followed initially brought England a rich harvest. It acquired control over Germany's colonies and the German oil concessions in Iraq. The German fleet was destroyed.

The German Reich had to pay reparations to the victorious powers for 92 years, and Germany's strength was broken for a long time.

The English rhetoric was just as bitter for the Germans as the defeat in the First World War itself. Great Britain, like all its allies, maintained in the Council of the victorious powers that Austria and Germany had solely caused the war. It accused the Germans of being incapable of administering colonies. It claimed to have fought the war for democracy, human rights, and the right of peoples to self-determination, and it worked with the other victors to ensure that Germany and Austria-Hungary retained their

¹ In July 1898, England threatened France with war and forced it to send a military and research expedition. to withdraw from Fashoda in Sudan.

² In 1905, Russia lost a war against Japan with the naval Battle of Tsushima.

Abolish monarchies. This package of accusations and demands reinforces the stereotype among many Germans that the British are perfidious and deceitful. Finally, while British politicians were accusing the Germans of being incapable of colonial rule in 1919, British soldiers were shooting Indian demonstrators in Amritsar. This particular "capacity" of the English for colonial rule cost 450 Indians their lives in a single day. England's claim to represent the right of peoples to self-determination is clearly refuted in Ireland, Kenya, Egypt, India, Burma and elsewhere on this earth. And England's declaration of fighting for democracy and its demand to depose the German emperor and the princes seems absurd for a country that introduced "equal" suffrage almost 50 years after the German Empire and that itself allowed itself to be ruled by princes, dukes, and kings. Thus, after the First World War, "the English" were not seen in Germany as fair, just, and peace-loving, as they themselves would have liked to be perceived.

With the "peace treaty" of 1919, England made its first disastrous contribution to ensuring that peace would soon be followed by another war. The British government, in conjunction with the other victorious Allied powers, constructed a new version of its balance of power for Europe, based on a protracted conflict between Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. The incorporation of the settlement area of almost five million Germans into the newly created states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Slovakia, as undertaken at Versailles, and the Danzig-Pomerelia construct were designed to keep the Germans, Czechs, and Poles "occupied" and in conflict. Danzig, in particular, as the child of three separated parents—Germany, Poland, and the League of Nations—was bound to eventually lead to conflicts and changes. New wars were thus foreseeable from Versailles onward. This was also recognized in England. British governments since 1920 have accepted, if not deliberately maintained, this risk of war as a consequence of their balance of power.

The post-war period followed, in which England's foreign policy shifted from territorial gain to maintaining existing power. Securing gains from conquest was only possible if maintaining the status quo was henceforth recognized under international law, and conquests such as the British ones of the last twenty years in Sudan, Orange, and Transvaal were thus sanctioned. , will be internationally ostracized in the future. Consequently, England henceforth advocates for peace in the world, even though it continues to intervene militarily here and there in China, Russia and Egypt during the 1920s.

However, with its policy of maintaining the status quo, England is failing to eliminate the disruptive factors it created in Versailles and Saint-Germain.

³ Cultural timetable, page

⁴ 1036. Orange and Transvaal are now parts of the Republic of South Africa.

Thus, the British allowed the Memel question to fester, the Danzig Corridor problem to persist, and the arms issues to remain unresolved. They ignored the plight of minorities in Poland, France, and Czechoslovakia. They disregarded Austria's desire for Anschluss and tolerated France's demand that Germany's border with it remain permanently unprotected. When Germany, under Hitler, began to resolve these issues one by one on its own from 1936 onward, Europe was repeatedly brought to the brink of war, and England gradually lost its self-respect and face. As early as 1933, England began to label Germany an aggressor and a disruptor of the peace. Until 1936, this was only true insofar as the German Reich disrupted this kind of British conception of the status quo. At that time, Germany made no demands of England or France. The British peace of preserving its victorious position remained unchallenged for the time being. England's contribution to the permanent threat of war from 1936 onwards consists in the fact that it does not eliminate the disruptive factors it helped create at Versailles, as long as this would be possible in peacetime.

England's next contribution is its naval buildup. Instead of reducing its armed forces, including its navy, to the "minimum compatible with national security," as stipulated in the treaty, the United Kingdom participates in the arms race between the USA and Japan. This, in turn, affects the land and air forces of other nations. Overall, Great Britain, together with Germany's neighbors, dictates to the German Reich, which was unprotected until 1936, the level of armament to which the Reichswehr must be modernized in order to defend Germany if necessary. However, the armament levels of the other nations are so high that Germany itself becomes capable of aggression against some of its neighbors.

During the Sudetenland crisis, England made its first serious effort to mitigate some of the damage caused by the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler, who clearly wanted more than just to repatriate the Sudeten Germans, did not thank England for this assistance at the Munich Conference. As would later become apparent, the dictator intended to annex all of Czechoslovakia to the German Reich. However, even before Hitler committed his crime against the remainder of Czechoslovakia in 1939, England began preparing for war with Germany with full force. It doubled its defense budget and established an "immediate reserve" for the fleet. and a "Voluntary National Service for the Defence of England" and pressures the Soviet Union to provide loans for its arms purchases.

In March 1939, the dictator Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia, and at the same time Hungary annexed Carpathian Ruthenia. England now had grounds to defend the freedom of the Czechs and Ruthenians and to wage war against the German Reich and Hungary. However, neither action was taken. Thus, the obligation to maintain peace was reinstated between Great Britain and Germany.

⁵ This regulation allows the conscription of reservists before the official mobilization.

Because England would later have tried to liberate the Czechs and Ruthenians. Such an intention never existed.

England's political elite, however, had grown weary of the new German Reich government gradually dismantling the consequences of Versailles without the British government having any significant influence. With the annexation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, Hitler had gone too far. London was no longer prepared to comply with any further German demands, however justified. Instead, the next German demand would be the pretext for putting an end to Germany's growing power. Shortly after the German invasion of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, England began to orchestrate the next world war.

Since Hitler renounced Alsace-Lorraine and South Tyrol in treaties with France and Italy, the only remaining legacies of Versailles were Danzig, the Polish Corridor, the fate of the German minority in Poland, and the colonies. Ambassador Phipps wrote in his final report before returning to London from the embassy in Berlin in 1937: *"Hitler wants Austria, then the Sudetenland, then Memel, the Corridor,*

Danzig and finally the lost colonies." His successor in Berlin,⁶ Henderson, shared this view. Hitler had raised the colonial question far too often with Chamberlain, at Halifax, and with himself. Thus, it was crucial for London that the revisions of the facts established at Versailles be prevented before England's war gains came into play. And before the later negotiations concerning the former German colonies, only Danzig remained on the agenda.

With the conquest of Czechoslovakia, Hitler himself hands the British the brakes they can use to stop him. And England pulls the brakes.

The British government is constructing a logic that everyone understands, one that shifts the focus away from the colonial problem. England accuses Germany of striving for a world empire in Eastern Europe instead of annexing the territories separated from the Reich in 1919. This is true insofar as this is Hitler's still-secret intention. This is not true insofar as this is far removed from the German people and their Wehrmacht. However, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, German economic influence in Southeast Europe, and the German-Polish negotiations concerning Danzig and the Polish Corridor all point eastward.

England used the resulting situation to create an obstacle for Germany at the Danzig problem, forcing it to either stop or jump. The British government offered Poland a guarantee against Germany, even though Germany was not yet threatening Poland and even though England was incapable of protecting Poland in a serious crisis. At that time, the German government was negotiating

⁶ Henderson, page 129

The German government negotiated with the Polish leadership for the return of Danzig and the construction of extraterritorial transport links between East Prussia and the Reich. In return, it offered recognition of Poland's territorial gains of 1919 in West Prussia and Posen, and the preservation of Polish economic and port privileges in Danzig. Poland, which had been struggling for two decades for recognition of these territorial gains, could certainly have reached a trade agreement with Germany. However, with the two guarantees and promises of aid issued on March 31, 1939, and August 25, London had virtually eliminated any reason for Warsaw to respond favorably to Berlin's demands.

Thus, Hitler was ultimately left not with the choice between a negotiated solution or war, but only the fatal one between renunciation and war. Furthermore, the British promise to "immediately provide all the support and assistance within their power"⁷ instilled in the Polish government and public a sense of victory that led them to prefer war to compromise. The guarantees were intended to restrain Hitler; instead, they mobilized the Poles.

That London is not concerned with the independence of the Czechs or Poles, nor with human rights and peace, nor with the freedom of smaller nations, is demonstrated by England's other actions. Parallel to the German atrocity against Czechoslovakia, Hungary conquers Carpathian Ruthenia. At the same time, Poland marches against Lithuania and threatens war to force the retroactive recognition of the Polish conquest of Vilna in 1921.

Neither of these things moves the British.

Then England negotiated with the Soviets for an alliance to participate in the war against Germany, granting the Russians the right to intervene in the three small Baltic states. So, the freedom of small nations isn't exactly a priority for the British. The fact that the Balts were part of the Tsarist Empire for two centuries pales in comparison to the thousand years that Czechoslovakia was part of the German Reich. Furthermore, in attempting to forge an alliance with the Soviets, England chose a totalitarian partner that already had millions of Russian deaths to its name, thanks to the persecution of non-communists, the expropriation and expulsion of its farmers, and the purges of its party and military.

If England had wanted to fight for the enforcement of human rights in other countries, it certainly wouldn't have sought the help of the totalitarian Moscow regime. The move with Poland is directed solely against Germany, and it's not driven by noble motives.

England's final and most direct contribution to the outbreak of this war is the double game that the British government ultimately played with the German Reich.

⁷ Wording from Article 1 of the British-Polish Mutual Assistance Pact of 25 March 1939

The government is driving this. In the last week before the outbreak of war, British Prime Minister Chamberlain and his Foreign Secretary Halifax give Adolf Hitler the impression that they are interested in an Anglo-German alliance, which they are not in reality, and that they want to play the role of fair broker between Poland and Germany. At the same time, Minister Halifax has Ambassador Kennard in Warsaw convey, in essence, that they only want talks from the Poles, but no concessions. Even in communicating the location and date of the negotiations, the British initially misled the Germans into believing that they had recommended German conditions to the Poles.

In Warsaw, however, they advise against agreeing to it. In Berlin, they only announce it after the waiting period has expired. The whole thing is a double game played by the British government. On the one hand, it leads Hitler to believe that it, too, is interested in a German-British alliance and that it can mediate fairly with the Poles. The British government thus creates the illusion that it is fighting for peace. On the other hand, it creates the scenario in which the German-Polish dispute will erupt into the next war. With its guarantees, it initially removes any incentive for the Polish government to negotiate.

Then she makes it clear to her that she doesn't have to accommodate the German side, and finally, she handles the mediation so stallingly that the start of the German-Polish talks demanded by Hitler falls through. Even if the British justify their actions in 1939 by claiming they wanted to prevent negotiations under pressure from the German Reich government, as had previously occurred in the case of Czechoslovakia, the result remains that they also undermined a German-Polish understanding, first in its initial stages and later during the crisis.

The British knew that in 1939 Hitler faced a choice between renunciation, a negotiated solution, or war. They also knew that, given his responsibility for the "separated" Germans, the increasingly precarious situation of the German minority in Poland, and the urgent demands of the people of Danzig for reunification with their homeland, he could hardly renounce his demands. In this respect, the German Reich was under the same moral pressure as the NATO states in 1999, given the plight of the persecuted Kosovars in Yugoslavia. The British could be certain that under these circumstances, Hitler would not call for a retreat, and that he would not renounce his demands.

In doing so, they obstructed the negotiating avenue they could have opened with Poland. They stalled for time until Hitler acted and declared war. England, along with France, created the German-Polish problem and prevented its resolution without war in 1939. The British government skillfully feigned the role of mediator and urged peace on all sides. This allowed them to enter the war "with a clean slate," before Germany's fleet grew further, before the German Reich became the strongest power in Europe, and before the former

The issue of German colonies came up on the agenda. On September 3, 1939, Great Britain declared war on the German Reich.

The Times reported the following in 1919, after the First World War:

"If Germany resumes trading in the next 50 years, this war will have been fought in vain."

After the Second World War, the SUNDAY CORRESPONDENT wrote in its edition of September 16, 1989:

"We did not enter the war in 1939 to save Germany from Hitler, or the Jews from Auschwitz, or the continent from fascism. As in 1914, we entered the war for the no less noble reason that we could not accept German hegemony in Europe."

France's contribution to the outbreak of war

Since the days of King Louis XIII and his first minister, Cardinal Richelieu—beginning with the conquest of Lorraine in 1633—it has been the goal of all French governments to extend France's eastern border towards the Rhine. And this eastward expansion was by no means satisfied with the annexation of Lorraine and Alsace. When Germany recaptured the two provinces in 1871 for almost half a century, the French not only retained the desire to reclaim both territories at the next opportunity, but their desire for further German territories west of the Rhine remained unfulfilled. In 1917—still during the war—the French government, in a secret treaty, secured the German Saar region from the Russians. In the Versailles negotiations, France then attempted to annex the Saarland and Luxembourg and to separate the German lands on both sides of the Rhine from the German Reich as a separate "Rhineland State." All of this fails only due to the objections of other victorious powers.

Even after the "peace treaty" of Versailles, France did not conclude a true peace with its neighbor Germany. The so-called peace effectively ostracized Germany, bled it exceptionally hard, and permanently deprived it of its capacity for self-defense. As long as defeated Germany, after the First World War, might have needed France's hand and assistance, the French remained irreconcilable.

After the first war, the French, together with the other victors, created the problems that would inevitably ignite another war. They demanded the right to self-determination for minorities and, to this end, partitioned the defeated states. Then, immediately and against all their own rules, they created new minorities, which they incorporated into newly created states against their will.

Thus, Poland and the two Versailles creations, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, which have since disintegrated, are nothing more than distorted reflections of the multi-ethnic states that had just vanished. France was also one of the architects of the League of Nations mandates of Memel and Danzig. With each of these League of Nations constructs, the French secured influence and a right of presence in the Baltic Sea, where, as a non-bordering state, they otherwise had no natural interests to represent. In 1919, France created the majority of the reasons for the Second World War, even though in 1939 it was Germany that used one of these reasons as a pretext for starting the war.

France's contribution to the outbreak of war in 1939, between the two wars, was similar to that of the British. However, France proceeded massively from the outset. While the British allowed the seeds sown at Versailles to ripen for almost two decades without further intervention, France attempted to undermine Germany's sovereignty and external security in four ways. First, in violation of their disarmament obligations, the French maintained a significant military superiority over their German neighbors for well over a decade and a half. Second, from 1927 to 1933, the French governments successfully blocked the Geneva disarmament negotiations, thus preventing Germany from regaining its capacity for self-defense. Third, France repeatedly exploited Germany's weakness, marching its troops into the German Reich despite the peace treaty. And fourth, within just a few years, France erected a wall of anti-German military pacts around the German Reich.

With this wall of treaties with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, the Soviet Union and Belgium, France succeeds not only in encircling Germany and Austria.⁸

It also forged an alliance that outnumbered Germany twelve to one in peacetime strength and roughly one hundred in wartime, so that Hitler and the Reichswehr had to orient themselves toward it when building a new Wehrmacht from 1935 onward. France failed to reduce the threat surrounding Germany during the years when Hitler had offered to limit German armaments. Furthermore, France based its security on military alliances without considering that it would one day have to "return" that security. And in doing so, it became entangled in all the conflicts of its allies. In short, France's security efforts after the First World War consisted of keeping Germany small, not of comparing itself to the Germans.

When Hitler declared the remainder of the disintegrating Czechoslovakia a protectorate in March 1939, in violation of international law and his own promises, France seized the opportunity to initiate further revisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

⁸ French treaties: 1919 with Great Britain, 1920 with Belgium, 1921 with Portugal, 1924 with Czechoslovakia, 1926 with Romania, 1927 with Yugoslavia, and 1932 with the Soviet Union

to prevent this. Poland, having been ostracized by England over Teschen, suddenly becomes its ally, and France thus finds a new partner it can activate against Germany. The French, who themselves helped to instigate the Polish-German dispute over Danzig at Versailles, do not use their alliance influence over the Poles in the slightest to steer towards a peaceful solution. They make no attempt whatsoever to mediate between the two adversaries or even to address the problems themselves. France wants to defeat Germany in a new war because of its resurgence and the occupation of Czechoslovakia. It therefore encourages the Polish government to remain firm in its stance against German demands and, if necessary, to risk a war over Danzig, at a time when the German Reich government is still trying to avoid a military confrontation with the Poles.

In May 1939, the French commander-in-chief, General Gamelin, promised the Polish Minister of War, Kasprzycki, that France would join Poland in a campaign against Germany. The French Prime Minister, Daladier, and his Foreign Minister, Bonnet, knew that Gamelin had made this promise and did not intend to honor it, even if necessary. They allowed the Poles to falsely believe that they could defeat Germany together with France. In May 1939, the German Reich government's negotiating proposals regarding Danzig and the transit routes were still so modest that Poland could have achieved peace without suffering any territorial losses. It was France that, at this crossroads in May 1939, did not advise the Polish government to normalize relations, to negotiate, or to accept peace at what was still a minimal price, but instead tempted Poland with false promises to embark on the path to war.

The French promise to attack Germany in the event of a conflict over Danzig therefore carried more weight than the British guarantee because, in 1939, only the French possessed an army capable of directly and immediately attacking Germany. The British, with their navy and air force—as the Poles also knew—could only provide indirect assistance and in a protracted war. Poland, however, could only win a war, and even survive it if things went badly, with direct and rapid aid. Thus, it was primarily the French government that lured Poland into the war with the promise of a two-front war against Germany. With such a "good outlook," the Polish government had little incentive to negotiate a new Danzig status or extraterritorial German transit routes.

In 1939, France showed little inclination to give peace a chance. Even shortly before the fateful Gamelin promise of May 17th to Kasprzycki, Pope Pius XII attempted to resolve or defuse the conflicts through negotiations among the major European powers at a five-power conference. French Prime Minister Daladier, as reported, refused to participate in such negotiations. In the early

In the summer of 1939, the French were primarily occupied with arranging a Franco-British-Polish-Soviet coalition for war against the German Reich. France hoped to defeat Germany with minimal expenditure of its own resources, leveraging the strength of its assembled allies. It also endeavored to lower the threshold for a new world war to such an extent that it would become probable. Thus, on July 1, 1939, French Foreign Minister Bonnet informed the German Reich government in a note that even a German attempt to alter the status quo of Danzig would lead to war with Germany.

It's worth a try!

Even when Hitler rescinded the attack orders for the Wehrmacht on August 24th and again – at 5 to 12 – on August 30th, thus showing that he only wanted Danzig and not Poland, France encouraged Poland to say no to the proposed, moderate Danzig settlement, knowing full well that this meant war.

French efforts to resolve the problem of the Free City of Danzig, a problem created by Versailles itself, through consensus with the parties involved, were unsuccessful. Aside from numerous declarations of its own desire for peace, France contributed nothing to peace. In 1939, President Daladier was just as ready for war as Hitler. One did not shy away from war if it meant reducing Germany back to the level of Versailles. The other did not shy away from war if it meant eliminating the last remaining obstacles of Versailles: the separation of Danzig and East Prussia from the German Reich. On September 3, 1939, France declared war on the German Reich.

Poland's contribution to the outbreak of war

Poland is not only the punished heir to a burden inherited at Versailles, with a large number of ethnic minorities and many imposed border problems. Although Poland appears on the surface to be the first victim of the Second World War, on closer inspection it is also among the first perpetrators.

The newly re-established state of Poland in 1918 managed to initiate conflicts and wars with almost all of its neighbors within the first four years of its existence. In 1918, even before the Versailles border decisions, Poland took advantage of the armistice between the victorious powers and the German Reich and swiftly annexed the formerly German provinces of Posen and West Prussia.

The latter, however, is not predominantly Polish, and the annexation of the north of the province separates the German part of East Prussia from the rest of Germany.

⁹ Paul Karl Schmidt, page 74

The German Reich. The so-called Corridor is created. Even though the victors later grant this territory to Poland, it is nevertheless Poland that first creates the facts, that then prevents a plebiscite in the disputed land, and that in 1939 rejects a moderate solution for connecting East Prussia to the Reich as unacceptable. The Corridor problem, created and maintained by Poland, becomes Poland's downfall in 1939.

The Polish attempts from 1919 to 1921 to thwart a plebiscite in Upper Silesia, and when that failed, to conquer German Upper Silesia, belong to the same pattern. The behavior of the Poles in the Upper Silesian conflict contributed significantly to the fact that a large majority of Germans accepted Hitler's declaration of war in 1939 as just and fair, even if they did not, in principle, want to wage this war against Poland.

In 1920, wars against the Soviet Union and Lithuania followed. Poland disregarded the Polish-Soviet border demarcation established by the victors' Supreme Allied Council and annexed a country predominantly inhabited by Belarusians and Ukrainians. This breach of international law created two further problems for Poland: the Soviet Union's enduring hostility and large minority populations that it failed to integrate until 1939. Poland paid the price for its 1920 attack on Russia with the invasion of the Red Army in September 1939.

Also in 1920, Poland annexed Vilna, the capital of Lithuania, and the surrounding area. This would likely have had little consequence in 1939 if Poland had left Lithuania alone after the conquest. However, in 1938, Poland again marched troops to the Lithuanian border and demanded international recognition of its 1920 annexation. The Polish government threatened Lithuania with war if it refused to acknowledge the conquest. A similar situation occurred with the Czechs in 1938. Polish forces marched near Cieszyn on the Czech border. The Polish government demanded the cession of the Cieszyn region and threatened war if this was refused. With its repeated threats and military build-ups, Poland not only violated the Kellogg Pact, which prohibited such actions, but also forfeited its moral right to preferential treatment. Marshal Piłsudski's attempt in 1933 to provoke France into a war of aggression against Germany also reflects the Poles' style at that time of conducting an active foreign policy through war. Thus, in 1939, apart from Latvia and Romania, the Polish people had no neighboring nation that would have any qualms about retaliating in kind.

What could have saved Poland in 1939 was a network of bilateral and collective protection treaties. But even this framework was undermined by the Poles themselves. The Kellogg Pact was violated so often that it no longer protected Poland in 1939. With the conquest of Teschen in 1938, Poland lost the protection of the 1929 Litvinów Protocol and the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact.

From 1932. With its mobilization against Germany in March 1939, a direct response to a German offer of negotiations and in violation of the treaty, the Polish government prompted Adolf Hitler to denounce the German-Polish Friendship and Non-Aggression Pact of 1934. Even though this decision by Hitler is controversial under international law and considered excessive, it was nevertheless triggered by Poland itself. Thus, until the outbreak of war, Poland created a treaty-free zone around itself, in which only the rules of might prevail, as Poland had been applying to almost all its neighboring states since 1918.

In this unfavorable situation for Poland, it contributed to two conflicts that ultimately triggered the Second World War: the Danzig question and the minority question. The population of Danzig, invoking the right of self-determination, demanded annexation to their motherland, and all post-war German governments demanded Danzig's annexation to the Reich. Poland was affected insofar as it had possessed limited postal, traffic, port, shipping, military, and customs rights in the city since 1920. Furthermore, Poland had been entrusted with the diplomatic representation of the Free City of Danzig. In 1939, Germany offered Poland the preservation and retention of its port, traffic, and shipping rights if Danzig were annexed to the German Reich. Poland, in turn, offered Danzig the return of its diplomatic representation rights to the Danzig Senate. If Danzig were annexed by the Reich, the Polish state would only lose its postal and customs rights and an ammunition depot on the Westerplatte peninsula. This is the real issue at stake, the one that led to the World War. But the political stakes were of a completely different magnitude. The old Hanseatic city, with its 97% German population, was fraught with its own desires and historical memories for the Poles. Marshal Rydz-ŹmigŹy summed it up perfectly in an official communiqué on July 20, 1939:

"An occupation of Danzig by Germany would be an act that reminds us of the partition of Poland." Thus, on March 26, 1939,¹⁰

when Ambassador Lipski conveyed the rejection of the German proposals and demands from Warsaw, the fateful declaration for Poland was issued, in which Lipski threatened: *"I have the unpleasant duty to point out that any further pursuit of these German plans,*

especially insofar as they concern the return of Danzig to the Reich, means war with Poland." The Polish government declared here, and several times thereafter, that Poland

would wage war against Germany if Danzig were annexed. It created the pretext for¹¹ war by declaring a local, non-warlike problem, in which no Polish territory was even affected, a cause for war. Without this premature declaration of war, the Danzig question would have been far less serious.

¹⁰ Documents Brit. Foreign Policy, Third Series, Volume VI, Document 368

¹¹ IMT Documents, Volume XLI, Document 208

Costs could be settled. Poland demanded war as the price for Danzig starting in March 1939. This was Poland's first major contribution to the outbreak of World War II on September 1, 1939.

Poland's second major contribution to the outbreak of war has long been rooted in its treatment of its national minorities. Despite all the minority protection treaties that were concluded, terminated, and mostly ignored, the plight of Germans, Belarusians, and Ukrainians in Poland was so harsh that the home countries of these minorities almost always had grounds to intervene to protect those oppressed in Poland. From May 1939 onward, the persecution and harassment of the minorities intensified to such an extent that a new treaty guaranteeing the human and civil rights of Poland's German-speaking citizens became imperative. Thus, the German-Polish minority question ultimately overshadowed the Danzig Corridor issue, giving it its own dangerous dynamic. This placed Hitler under a time pressure that would not have arisen solely from Danzig and the Corridor. Poland's way of dealing with its 10 million citizens whose native language was a foreign one acted as the accelerant that led to the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939.

The Soviet Union's contribution to the outbreak of war

Soviet Russia's foreign policy after the First World War obviously has at least three roots, and these are, firstly, strategic traditions as a legacy from the Tsarist era, secondly, a world missionary ambition as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution, and thirdly, the urge to restore Russia's former greatness as a consequence of the lost First World War.

The first of these roots to become apparent is the latter. Russia suffered significant territorial losses at the end of the lost war, similar to Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Finland, the three Baltic republics, and large parts of Belarus and Ukraine became sovereign states or Polish territories. Thus, the new Soviet Union was driven to reclaim territories that had been under the Russian crown in the old Tsarist empire. This explains why, in 1939, the Soviet Union successfully sought to regain "Eastern Poland," either indirectly through a military alliance with Great Britain and France, or directly with German assistance. The Finns, the Balts, and the Bessarabians also became "Russian" again in 1940 with indirect German support.

The second most outwardly recognizable root is the state-supporting idea of the Soviet Union: Bolshevism or Communism. This class ideology was presented in Soviet Russia as a doctrine of liberation for oppressed societies.

The doctrine encompasses the social classes and peoples considered colonial. From this doctrine stems a missionary obligation towards the exploited people in capitalist states and colonies. Lenin set this missionary drive a foreign policy goal with the idea of the "final victory of socialism over capitalism" through a "revolution on a world scale," a goal inherently explosive. This goal threatens societies and states with different worldviews. However, the conflicting element of "ideology" only became a direct threat to capitalist states and colonial powers after the Second World War. Before the war, the difference in worldviews only divided the Soviet Union and Germany from 1933 onwards. Hitler's National Socialism, as a competing model to Communism, had a more aggressive effect on Soviet Bolshevism than the hitherto rather indifferent worldviews and social philosophies in the other capitalist states. Thus, the German Reich and the Soviet Union lived in constant latent antagonism from 1933 onwards, although this did not trigger the Second World War.

The antagonism between capitalism and communism, however, contributed indirectly to the outbreak of war. In 1939, Stalin was prepared to participate in a war to regain "Eastern Poland." That's the surface. Beneath it, as a second layer, lay his desire to transform the societies of the capitalist states through the misery and consequences of war in Europe, making them more receptive to the idea of communism. Stalin's two goals in 1939 were, in the short term, "Eastern Poland," and in the long term, the spread of communism in Western Europe. He initially relied on the support of the British and French, who needed his military aid. He enticed both with the offer of 120 divisions for another war with Germany. He reinforced their belief that they preferred to risk war rather than return Danzig to the German Reich. When Poland scuttled this kind of military alliance and it became clear that the British and French intended to leave the main burden of the war to the Soviets, Stalin backed the Germans. He guaranteed Hitler freedom of action, secured – albeit only in coded form – permission in a secret additional protocol to reconquer the lost border territories of the old Tsarist empire, and then annexed "Eastern Poland" without any casualties of his own.

However, Stalin's plan initially proved incomplete. The German campaign against Poland ended too quickly, and the hoped-for war of attrition between the capitalist states of Germany and France did not materialize in 1939.

England. Thus, at the end of the conflict over Poland, neither are the people in the capitalist states ready for a Bolshevik revolution, nor can the Soviet Union – as Lenin had foreseen – as the last strong great power in Europe, "grab the capitalist states by the throat," to use Lenin's metaphor. For that to happen, the Soviet Union must once again switch sides and suffer terrible losses itself.

The third root mentioned earlier is Russia's strategic tradition. Peter the Great began developing Russia into a naval power. For over a century, the expansionist interests of the Tsarist Empire clashed with those of the Japanese in the Far East, the British in the Middle East, and the Ottomans at the mouth of the Black Sea. The drive for greater reach and trade on the seas has a long tradition in Russia. Added to this was the desire to gain political influence over the masses in the colonies of foreign states. Trade, the expansion of power, and the "missionary drive" require open access to the seas and, consequently, a fleet. Thus, in 1935, Stalin began to rebuild the Soviet Union into a first-rate naval power with a large navy. Access to the Atlantic in Europe was provided by the ice-free ports of Finland and the Baltic states. It is in keeping with Russian strategy and the logic of their naval policy that they need their own Baltic ports. Stalin must therefore ensure that the postwar territorial order in Europe is altered. To achieve this, he needs the approval or paralysis of the major European powers, which he secures with promises of alliance from the British and French, and then from the Germans. During negotiations with the British and French, Stalin also secured the right of intervention against Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania in return for his military aid against Germany. Stalin intends to achieve the territorial gains he seeks for Soviet Russia under the cover of a war waged by the British, Germans, and French. The dispute over Danzig and the German minority in Poland serves this purpose perfectly. Stalin kept his ideas secret from Hitler and von Ribbentrop for a secret additional protocol intended to secure "Eastern Poland" and the Baltic states for him, until they were forced to sign the deal with their backs against the wall or give way to the Poles.

The Soviet leadership never once attempted to mediate the differences between the Germans and the Poles, thus giving peace a chance. From the outset, Stalin was banking on a war which he believed would alter the territorial order of Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union's advantage.

The US contribution to the outbreak of war

The major power that did not directly intervene in the war in 1939 must not be omitted here. The United States of America bears some responsibility for the Versailles disaster and for the fact that the Danzig Corridor problem was not resolved peacefully before it became the cause of a new world war. But beneath the Danzig and Versailles issues lies another reason that drives the USA into clashes with foreign states. It is the threat of-

The North Americans' claim to power and their values. Beginning with expansion across the North American continent, continuing with the claim to dominance over both Americas in the Monroe Doctrine, furthered by the "liberation conquest" of the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific and the support of the British and French in the First World War, this expansion culminated in a second great war intended to rid the world of the "disease of the three rogue states"—Germany, Italy, and Japan. One aspect of this endeavor was the crusade to protect those threatened; the other was the expansion of power, market forces, and morality, the latter of which, from the perspective of non-Americans, primarily represented their worldview.

Thus, the Americans first protected their settlers, then the countries of South America, and then the states of Western Europe and the Pacific. North America always saw itself on the side of the threatened and of justice. The byproducts were first a conquered continent, then dominance over South America and possession of the former Spanish colonies, and after 1919, as the final step on this path, the economic penetration of Europe and China by the USA.

America, which entered World War I heavily indebted, emerged from the war as the world's largest creditor nation. It is impossible to determine whether moral convictions drove this expansion of power, or whether the pursuit of power misused morality as a mere label, or whether both factors simply combined to a profitable degree in the USA.

At the beginning of World War I, the USA and Germany faced each other without conflict or tension. From 1914 to 1916, America was only engaged in an armed conflict with its neighbor Mexico. Before his re-election as president, Wilson promised his countrymen that he would keep the USA out of the distant war overseas. However, America supplied Germany's enemies by sea with food, raw materials, munitions, and weapons, and Germany attempted to cut off its maritime supply lines from February 1917 onward with unrestricted submarine warfare. When Imperial Russia also collapsed in revolution in February 1917, thus eliminating it as an Eastern Front against Germany, the war suddenly became a risk for the state and economy of the USA. If Germany were to prevail over its remaining enemies, all outstanding debts and loans in France and England would be lost, and the USA would be even poorer after the war than before. The danger that Russia's defeat posed to the economy in the USA, the unlimited submarine warfare in the Atlantic, and a support offer from the Germans to the Mexicans that was initially secret but later became public, led Wilson to declare war on the German Empire on April 2, 1917, and shortly thereafter on Austria-Hungary as well.

Now, suddenly, the industrial powerhouse USA, with its vast population and large naval and merchant fleets, finds itself on the side of the British and French. These three powers defeat Germany, Austria, and Hungary within two years. The two threads leading from this point to the next war are the changing perception of Germany in the USA and the damage inflicted on the Germans by Wilson's five notes and his Fourteen Points after the 1919 defeat.

Hardly had America entered the war in 1917 when the president, the political elite, and the press in the States began to morally elevate themselves and denigrate Germany. In America, instead of honestly acknowledging its own advantage, people spoke of human values that now needed protecting and of making the world "safer for democracy." Germany's submarine warfare became a "war against all nations," and the "authoritarian government in Germany" a "challenge for all humanity." In the minds of the American public, German front-line soldiers were soon "brutal and bloodthirsty Huns and vandals." The hatred and delusion that the Americans used as a stimulus during the First World War remained alive in many minds after the war.

Between the two wars, the US governments did nothing to reduce the anti-German sentiment they had fueled during the First World War.

The clichés about the "Huns" persist in the media and films. This is how the image of Germany is shaped when, 14 years after the First World War, a new German Reich government prepares to abolish the post-war order of Versailles.

The Roosevelt administration reacted very soon after Hitler's inauguration with a harshness toward Germany that was highly unusual between sovereign states living in a state of mutual peace. In historical accounts, Roosevelt's reactions to Hitler are generally explained solely by the fact that the German dictator despised the democratic system, persecuted Jews, and broke the law in his own country. But this explanation is questionable. Disregard for democracy, anti-Jewish policies, and violations of the law were also the hallmarks of states and governments with which Roosevelt collaborated without hesitation. Thus, the deeper reason for Roosevelt's unfriendly policy toward Germany, beginning as early as spring 1933, clearly lay in a hostility toward the Germans that he had harbored since the First World War. It is therefore quite possible that Roosevelt would have acted against any other German government in 1933 that had dared to attempt to release Germany from the punitive provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

Roosevelt's hatred for Hitler certainly did not diminish because the German dictator achieved success in one area of politics.

where he himself would have liked to have it. Germany's 6.3 million unemployed were largely back in work by 1936, and Roosevelt, with 12.8 million people out of work in 1933, still faced 10.4 million unemployed in 1938 despite his New Deal program. Thus, Hitler's German path with its "economic miracle" also became a popularity problem for Roosevelt at home.

The second thread, stretching from the First to the Second World War, unfolds from Wilson's many "peace notes." The USA, which initiated a negotiated peace in 1918 with Wilson's Fourteen Points, and subsequently insisted and repeatedly assured, through a whole series of further notes, that these Fourteen Points should form the basis of a negotiated peace, tolerated, from the very beginning of the armistice, Great Britain, Italy, and France ignoring and disregarding most of these Fourteen Points. With its series of notes, the USA had guaranteed Germany and Austria-Hungary that there would be a peace based on the terms of the Fourteen Points. The American-German exchange of notes on Wilson's Fourteen Points from January to November 1918 resembled a preliminary peace treaty, which the Americans reneged on almost as soon as the German, Austrian, and Hungarian troops laid down their arms in reliance on the Fourteen Points. In Versailles, the USA quietly and without fanfare withdrew from its moral and international legal obligation to uphold the agreed-upon terms. They allowed a post-war order to emerge in Europe, knowing full well that it would lead to the next war.

In the following years, the American nation shrouded itself in isolationism and acted as if it bore no responsibility for the wreckage left behind at Versailles. Thus, until 1939, successive US administrations took not a single effective step to alleviate or resolve the minority problems faced by the millions of German and Hungarian citizens separated from their homelands. America wanted nothing more to do with its guarantee of the Fourteen Wilson Points. Instead, the US focused on cementing the status quo of the German Reich from 1933 onward.

Before the 1918 armistice, US President Woodrow Wilson had given a written assurance that, in the event of a peace treaty, no parts of the country would be divided against the will of the affected populations or annexed by foreign powers. The German Reich had been negotiating precisely this point for years and had been threatening Hitler with it since September 1938. Roosevelt, then and later, failed to see that the US had any obligation in this matter. He saw "peace and justice" solely in preserving the status quo of national borders in Europe. Roosevelt, in his prejudice against Germany, was unable to recognize that the right of peoples to self-determination, proclaimed by the Americans themselves, also contributed to peace and justice.

Roosevelt was already painting a picture of Hitler's expansionist ambitions even before the dictator had publicly announced his intention to annex Austria and Czechoslovakia. The American president continued his "campaign" against Germany, even after Hitler had successively signed a friendship treaty with Poland, guaranteed France's possession of Alsace-Lorraine, and contractually agreed to limit the German fleet to 35% of the British fleet. Only with Hitler's atrocities against the Czechs was there a legal basis under international law for waging war against Germany. However, Roosevelt's hands were tied by the US Congress when Germany invaded Czechoslovakia. He therefore promised Poland, Britain, and France that he would actively support them in a war against Germany. In London, he even pressed hard to prevent the Germans from making any further attempts at revision. Roosevelt overlooked the fact that it was the USA that had first broken its word at Versailles and then sparked the Danzig dispute. In 1939, the American president wanted to prevent a Danzig settlement or war. His ambassador to England, Joseph Kennedy, said in December 1945, looking back on his time in London: *"Neither the French nor the British would have made the German-Polish question a cause for war if Washington hadn't been constantly probing it."*

12

Germany's contribution to the outbreak of war

The first thing that strikes the eye is that Hitler declared war on September 1, 1939, over Danzig. But this was merely the pretext that immediately escalated into a world war. Without this history, England and France would hardly have allowed themselves to be drawn into a new war on Poland's behalf solely over the Danzig and transit route issue. The real German contribution lay in two earlier events: the annexation of the Sudetenland to the Reich in October 1938 and the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the remnant of the country that had disintegrated in March 1939. Both events provoked international hostility toward Germany with varying degrees of intensity and severity.

The annexation of the Sudetenland, however legitimate it may be considered in Germany, ultimately only came about because Hitler enforced the annexation with the threat of waging war against Czechoslovakia otherwise.

The annexation formally took place in the Munich Agreement with the approval of the British, Italians, and French, but only because neither the Czechs nor the aforementioned powers felt capable at the time of militarily preventing the conquest of the Sudetenland. In Munich, Hitler forced

¹² Tansill, page 597

The three victorious powers mentioned above were, for the first time, themselves able to rescind one of the coercive measures of Versailles. In Paris and London, this could no longer be forgiven or forgotten. The British opposition politician Winston Churchill, despite British approval, therefore bluntly denounced the Munich Agreement as "German blackmail." The annexation of the Sudetenland triggered a wave of war preparations and anti-German sentiment in England and France. From the moment of the annexation—months before Hitler threatened the remainder of Czechoslovakia and before he began pressuring the Poles over Danzig—parliaments and the press in London and Paris began to speak and write about the imminent threat of war in Europe. Hitler was unable to persuade the former victorious powers, through diplomatic means and without such "blackmail," to themselves extinguish the last vestiges of Versailles. Instead, with the annexation of the Sudetenland, he ignited a general readiness for war against Germany.

Hitler provided the second and decisive trigger for the outbreak of war with the occupation of Czechoslovakia. In doing so, he violated international law. He broke his word and abandoned the hitherto legitimate line of his foreign policy of bringing only German people "home to the German Reich." With these three breaches of law, word, and policy, Hitler crossed the line of what the Versailles powers were prepared to tolerate. Yet, once again, London and Paris felt unable to take military action against Germany. However, with the occupation of Prague, the British and French resolved to present Hitler and the German Reich with the bill for their transgression against Czechoslovakia as quickly as possible. The outstanding items on the bill were: • punishment for the occupation of Czechoslovakia, • restoration of the power relations established by Versailles, • termination of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, • British "balance of power," and • French hegemony on the continent.

Even though the last two items are mutually exclusive, England and France each account for one and the other, respectively.

Without the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the governments in Paris and London could hardly have explained to the citizens of France and England why they should have gone to war for Poland because of the German city of Danzig. And without the war encouragement from London and Paris, the Warsaw government itself would have had to seek a peaceful solution. The tense situation in August 1939 could only have arisen because Hitler himself had provided the pretext for a new war six months earlier by occupying Czechoslovakia. The governments of England and France skillfully maneuvered Hitler, with Poland's help, into a dilemma in which he could only either relinquish Danzig and abandon the German minority or wage war against Poland. German complicity in the outbreak of the Second World War—

The primary objective lies in the occupation of Czechia and only secondarily in the violent resolution of the German-Polish problems.

In contrast, if one considers the most recent cause, the dispute over Danzig, it becomes clear that the substantive points of contention are now quite minor. After Hitler assured the Polish government that it would retain its existing economic privileges in Danzig, and after the Poles, for their part, were prepared to relinquish Danzig's foreign representation, only the Poles' customs and postal rights in the Free State and an ammunition depot remain as obstacles to an agreement between the two sides.

Of far greater weight were the emotional differences. The people of Danzig wanted to be part of their own country again after some 20 years, while the Polish population considered Danzig quintessentially Polish and saw its annexation by the German Reich as a national defeat for Poland. Given the minor significance of the remaining substantive points of contention and the fact that Hitler repeatedly informed the leaders of England and France that he did not want war with their countries, it was an extraordinary event that the Polish government declared Danzig's return a pretext for war, that Hitler started this war, and that Chamberlain and Daladier escalated the war over Danzig into a world war within two days.

The events in Danzig alone cannot explain why the governments of six nations deliberately steered towards war. But even the German occupation of Czechoslovakia is insufficient to fully explain this outbreak of war. The true reasons lie deeper.

balance sheet

The Great War, fought between 1939 and 1945, had its Central European (German), its Mediterranean (Italian), and its Pacific (Japanese) dimensions. In the latter two, it was the former Allies from the First World War who were fighting. The Central European (German) dimension was a repetition or continuation of the First World War, which the Germans had lost first in Flanders and on the Atlantic, and then at Versailles. In 1919, all the victors brought home their war gains: some German and Austrian border territories, others German colonies, and still others German industrial patents and reparations.

The victors failed to transform the end of the war into the beginning of peace. They cemented a situation that the defeated Germans and Austrians could not tolerate in the long run. In Germany, all democratic governments before 1933 ultimately failed due to the direct or indirect consequences of the burdens of Versailles and the victors' unwillingness to grant the Germans genuine peace.

Even as early as 1927, when the German Reich governments attempted to negotiate a degree of self-defense capability for their country, and when the Austrian and German governments strove for a customs union in 1931, they were disrupting what the victors considered "peace." The two new republics of Germany and Austria were, in 1919, given the "baptismal seals" of Versailles and Saint-Germain, destined to remain semi-sovereign states or become violators of the peace. Consequently, when the new German Reich government under Hitler began to dismantle the post-war order of Versailles piece by piece, it was disrupting what the victorious powers considered peace. Even the moderate start of the Hitler regime, which proactively made six offers to limit arms production, did not alter this. The status quo changes proposed by Germany were, in principle, violations of the Treaty of Versailles. Furthermore, it becomes clear that Hitler interprets every moderating step as a sign of weakness. The first example of this is his proposal to end the turmoil before the Saar plebiscite by foregoing a vote and concluding a friendly treaty with France that would enshrine the French current rights in Saar coal mining as a permanent solution. Hitler's failures at the negotiating table, in stark contrast to the successes he achieves through coups or threats, "train" the dictator to henceforth employ the latter methods.

The Reich's structurally unsound defenses, engineered at Versailles, with an unprotected Rhineland border against France and an army that was 12 times weaker than the armies of neighboring countries in peacetime and roughly 100 times weaker in wartime, were, given the invasions of Poland, France, Belgium, and Lithuania, no longer acceptable situation for the Germans. The rearmament of 51 peacetime divisions, plus roughly the same number of reserve divisions, and the rapid development of air forces for the period when the army was not yet fully capable of defense, appeared to most Germans at the time as a necessary measure, not as an omen of a new war initiated by Germany. However, for the victorious powers, the mere announcement of German rearmament was a breach of the "peace" of Versailles and a warning signal.

The Wehrmacht's reconstruction, which became evident from 1935 onwards, was viewed in this way even more so in Washington, Paris and London.

France and the USA failed to accept and contractually enshrine the limitations on German self-defense capabilities offered by Hitler in 1933 and 1934, and to pay for this with a reduction in their own armaments. Instead, neither the French were willing to sacrifice parts of their land and air forces, nor were the Americans willing to curb their enormous naval buildup. Each had "their good reasons." Hitler, at least, did contractually agree with Great Britain to a 1:3 inferiority of the German navy.

and to behave in accordance with the contract as long as he could expect that England will not act as an enemy state again.

During the early years of his rule, Hitler appeared to his own population, in terms of external security, as a "man of peace" due to his public speeches. Until September 1938, he gave no indication to the German people that he was prepared to use the Wehrmacht not only to protect the Reich but also to achieve his own goals. In the minds of the citizens and soldiers, the rebuilding of the Wehrmacht served solely the defense of their own country.

In 1933, history—as I believe—was still open-ended. The developments that culminated in the Second World War in 1939 ultimately confirmed the fears of the victorious powers, who had accused the Germans in general since 1919, and Hitler in particular since 1933, of having been working towards a new war and world domination. However, in their fear of Hitler and the Germans, the victorious powers themselves created the scenarios in which Hitler later resorted to violence instead of addressing the problems with patience and perseverance. Hitler also learned from the victorious powers that patience and perseverance alone would not suffice.

The prohibition of Reich defense in the Treaty of Versailles, the granted minimal army, the unprotected Rhineland border, the attacks by Poles, French, Lithuanians and Belgians on the Reich territory, the separation of German territories against the will of the affected population, the confiscation of German colonies and foreign possessions including money, mining and oil concessions, the encirclement of Germany with a network of military treaties and, last but not least, the French talk of the "aircraft carrier Czechoslovakia" at Germany's rear are the agenda items that Hitler considers his workload for the next few years.

The dictator committed a moral, human, and international crime against the Czechs by occupying Czechia and imposing a protectorate upon it. The victorious powers, who all condemn this, did not intervene, even though they had the right and the means to do so. Their inaction reinstated the obligation to maintain peace. Had this not been the case, other states would also have had the right to unleash new wars against England or France at any time, either to liberate third-party states from the protectorates imposed upon them or to start wars to settle old scores. Equal rights for all.

Despite this commitment to peace, the Second World War ignited six months later in Danzig, with its extraterritorial ties to East Prussia and the treatment of the German minority in Poland. The population of the Hanseatic city of Danzig, separated from their motherland against their will, wanted to be annexed to Germany. The people of East Prussia wanted transport routes for trade and travel from their own region to the main territory of the war.

They wanted their own state at their disposal, where they would be independent of Polish harassment in the future. And the Germans who remained in West Prussia, Posen, and Upper Silesia wanted to live free from oppression, discrimination, and persecution. The Poles, for their part, were unwilling to sacrifice a single meter of ancient Polish territory or any of their rights, and they expected loyalty from their German-speaking citizens. This was the crux of the matter in the spring of 1939.

Hitler held the subjective view that he had already gone a long way toward accommodating the Poles when, in 1934, he rejected the policies toward Poland pursued by his 16 predecessor governments and subsequently made no further demands for the return of West Prussia, Posen, and Upper Silesia. Since December 1938 and his agreement regarding Teschen, he also believed he could resolve German-Polish problems on the basis of territorial recognition for West Prussia, Posen, and Upper Silesia in exchange for Danzig and the extraterritorial transport routes. From December 24, 1938, his offer was termed "Recognition in exchange for Danzig plus a peace treaty for 25 years." On January 5, 1939, Hitler condensed his offer into a new, concise form: "Danzig will join the German community and remain economically part of Poland."

At this time, on January 26, 1939, and thus even before Hitler committed his original sin with Czechoslovakia and provided a pretext for war, the French Foreign Minister Bonnet and Prime Minister Daladier, with their speeches in the French National Assembly, fanned the flames upon which war would soon ignite: *"In the event of war, ... all of Great Britain's forces will be at the disposal of France,*

and likewise all of France's forces will be at the disposal of Great Britain." And addressing Poland:

"...that it is necessary to categorically reject the demands of certain neighbors." Daladier and Bonnet want neither a Danzig

solution nor reconciliation between the Germans and the Poles. Both obviously want war with Germany again.

Hitler clearly wants Danzig and – if possible – no war with Poland for it; war only if Poland leaves no other options open. This is how the first "Führer directive" of November 24, 1938, concerning Danzig, is to be understood, in which Hitler orders preparations for the swift occupation of the city from neighboring East Prussia. The route from East Prussia avoids the need for German troops to enter Polish territory and prevents a war with Poland from being necessary for the sake of annexation.

With the German invasion of the rest of Czechoslovakia, Germany, in the eyes of the British, French, Americans, and Soviets, had a reason for war.

Since none of them use the pretext of war as an opportunity for military intervention to save the Czechs, they are once again bound by the obligation to maintain peace. Instead, the governments of the USA, Great Britain, and France plant a new obstacle for Germany in the field of German-Polish differences they themselves had sown in Versailles. They encourage susceptible Poles to refuse any German demands, thereby preventing the resolution of problems they themselves created 20 years earlier. This, in the already heightened tension between Poland and the German Reich, is almost bound to ignite a new war.

Roosevelt promises Chamberlain and Daladier aid against Germany and encourages them not to shy away from another war. Chamberlain's offer of assistance removes the last incentive for the Poles to comply with German demands. Ultimately, his feigned mediation squanders Hitler's remaining time. Daladier and Gamelin lure the Poles onto a "path to victory" with the promise of a major French offensive against Germany's Western Front, a path that ends in disaster for the Poles.

Stalin is stoking the war fever on all sides. And Roosevelt, when he hears about Soviet "interests" in eastern Poland, leaves the Poles unwarned so that they don't ultimately sacrifice Danzig and thereby prevent a war.

Poland is not a protégé for anyone, but merely the means to ensure the next war. But Poland is not only the victim. The suffering inflicted by the Poles on "their" Germans, Belarusians, and Ukrainians weighs heavier in the summer of 1939 than the Danzig Corridor problem. In summary, one can say that the actors mentioned here—each in their own way—helped to instigate the Second World War. Complicit in this new war are the governments and states that created the conditions for the next war in Versailles and Saint-Germain and later, when danger threatened, deliberately prevented those conditions from being eliminated. This is what Asher ben Nathan meant when he said:

"What preceded the first shots is crucial."

Hitler triggered the German Wehrmacht's attack on the Polish army in the early morning of September 1, 1939, plunging the world into a maelstrom whose effects are still felt today.

ATTACHMENT

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What induced my father's generation to follow Adolf Hitler into a new war, just 20 years after the end of World War I? The author's search for an answer leads to some surprising conclusions.

Documents from foreign ministries, and notes and memoranda from British, French, Italian and American leaders, ministers, diplomats and military commanders, prove that quite a number of countries were involved in instigating World War II. Interconnections, hitherto overlooked, are made clear. "This war", writes Schultze-Rhonhof, "had many fathers."

Much in our German history from 1919 to 1939 cannot be understood without cognizance of contemporary events in other lands: actions and reactions are closely linked together. Yet it was not only contemporary events in neighboring nations which contributed to the start of the war, it was also, and not insignificantly, the joint prehistory of the disputing parties. When asked in an interview: Who started the 6-Day War of 1967 and fired the first shots?, the Israeli Ambassador in Bonn, Asher ben Nathan, answered: "That is totally unimportant. What is decisive is what preceded the first shots?" Almost every history has a prehistory.

